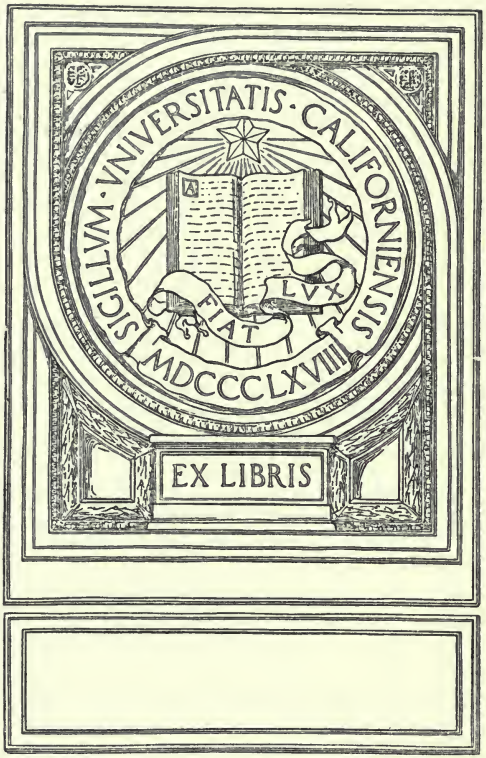
WITHOUT THE WALLS

KATRINA TRASK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WITHOUT THE WALLS

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"

WITHOUT THE WALLS

A READING PLAY

BY

KATRINA TRASK

Author of "In the Vanguard," "The Mighty and the Lowly," etc.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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ACT I

SCENE I

WITHOUT THE WALLS

ACT I

SCENE I

THE YEAR 33 A. D.

A Court in the House of Jahdiel, the Pharisee, in the City of Jerusalem. The House stands toward the Eastern Gate of the City, not far from the Temple.

To the right, a door enters into the private apartments of Alceda, the daughter of the House: to the left, a gate opens out on to the main road: in the background is a small, private gate that opens on to a by-road.

The Court is large and beautiful, filled with oleander trees in full blossom: beneath them are marble seats. A fountain plays in the centre of the Court: beside it is a special marble seat a little apart from the others: upon this is lying a lute and a scarf of gauze.

Beneath the trees near the fountain a merry black-eyed boy is lying lazily on his back, looking up, through the branches of the trees, to the blue sky.

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He is dressed in the picturesque parti-coloured garments of a house-servant of Judea: he is softly playing a flute.

A little farther off sits a large matronly Hebrew woman intently sewing a bright coloured fabric: she has a stern face and quick eager eyes that seem constantly on the alert: this is Elizabeth the nurse of Alceda. She looks with much contempt at the lazy boy lying on the grass.

ELIZABETH

David! David!

The flute playing continues.

ELIZABETH

Is the boy deaf? David!

DAVID

Laughing mockingly.

"Deaf-David!" That is not my name.

ELIZABETH

Your name makes not a dog's difference. What I want to know is this—have you done the work I bade you do? Did you sweep the inner Court?—Did you bring the water from the well?—Did you gather the rose leaves?

DAVID

Smiling and showing his very white teeth.

I did none of these things—I have been far too busy all day long.

ELIZABETH

Busy! Ha, busy! This morning you were throwing dice. I know it: Miriam saw you. I will tell the Master.

DAVID

Impudently.

And I will tell him it is not true. He will believe me: he thinks all women are liars.

ELIZABETH

Starting.

How know you that?

DAVID

How do I know when the sun shines, silly, or when the rain rains? By using my eyes.

ELIZABETH

Have you done nothing since you came in from playing dice? That was three hours ago.

DAVID

Mischievously.

I have been eating figs.

ELIZABETH

Scornfully.

A precious occupation for a full-grown man.

DAVID

Yesterday you said I was a half-grown boy.

ELIZABETH

Snappishly.

Yesterday was yesterday—to-day is to-day.

DAVID

Provokingly.

Ah! I have grown over night. How fast things grow in this country!

He rises, stretches himself, yawns lazily and walks over to the marble seat where the lute is lying: he looks at the lute seriously and kneels before it.

O silent lute! You are endowed with life since her dear fingers have touched you: she, the fairest lady in Judea, has given you life.

ELIZABETH

Is the Hebrew boy a heathen that he bends his knee to idols?

DAVID

Angrily.

You fat foolishness, I am as much a heathen as you are a beauty.

ELIZABETH

Thanks be to the Lord, there comes Alceda! Be off with you!

She rises and goes toward him threateningly: he makes a mischievous grimace. Alceda enters: she is young and very fair to look upon: her blue garments are woven of fine texture and overlaid with heavy embroideries of silver and gold. Alceda sees the grimace: she knows that there has been a conflict of words between David and Elizabeth —it is an occurrence which frequently happens.

ALCEDA

In a sweet pleading voice.

David.

David bows to the ground.

DAVID

Mistress.

ALCEDA

Seriously.

David, Elizabeth is my dear mother-nurse. If you would please me, you must please her.

DAVID

Humbly.

Yes, Mistress.

ALCEDA

Smiling.

Come, play me a tune on your pretty flute.

DAVID

Aside.

That would please Elizabeth about as much as it would please her to see a camel in her closet with her Sabbath garments.

Alceda sits on the marble seat beside her lute, and listens whilst David plays. When he finishes she smiles graciously.

ALCEDA

That tune is very lovely: it sounds like the

song birds singing their good-night amidst the oleander trees.

DAVID

O Mistress, you are very kind.

ALCEDA

Now go, David, like my dear carrier-boy and do the bidding of Elizabeth.

DAVID

Bowing profoundly.

O Mistress, I would go to death for you.

Exit David.

ELIZABETH

Gruffly.

You humour that boy far too much. You will spoil the little in him that is not already spoiled.

ALCEDA

Kindness does not spoil: our mighty David says—"Thy gentleness hath made me great"—gentleness helps—it never spoils. It is so pleasant to be kind. Life is a wonderful thing.

She takes up her lute, and passing her hand over the strings begins to play.

ALCEDA

Singing.

Down in the pool where the lilies grow,
Where the lovely water lilies blow,
Where the South wind stirs the almond tree,
In the pool with the hues of the blue-green sea,
To the dulcet sound of the lute's low note,
On the waveless waters we will float.

Cool is the plash of the water there,
Unbind the strands of the close-bound hair,
Slip from the bosom the wimple white;
In languorous fragrance of the night,
To the dulcet sound of the lute's low note,
On the waveless waters we will float.

ELIZABETH

Your Father would not like that song.

ALCEDA

And wherefore not?

ELIZABETH

Shrugging her shoulders.

Ask him.

ALCEDA

He would not tell me if I asked him—he tells me nothing.

ELIZABETH

Nay, not he!

ALCEDA

Then, wherefore ask?

ELIZABETH

That you may know there are things you may not know.

ALCEDA

Ah! Do I not know that too well!

Alceda drops her lute and goes to the nurse; she kneels beside her.

ALCEDA

O you who have been more than mother to me—tell me of my Mother!

ELIZABETH

Showing much agitation.

Hush!

ALCEDA

Now, by the sun in Heaven,—I will not hush!

Her lips tremble: tears come into her eyes.

Long ago, I saw a star-eyed Spirit of the night, bending above my bed—her garments were fragrant with perfume: her caressing arms enfolded me; I heard a voice—as soft as Summer breezes murmuring in the olive trees—and then, she was gone—I was alone—alone, with two stern frowns as guardians—that on my Father's brow, and that on yours. If I said "Mother" I was buffeted by him—and you would weep: it was not justice to a little child. At last, I am a woman—and I would wed: where is my Mother?

ELIZABETH

Sternly.

Wherever the Great Jehovah wills!

ALCEDA

Impatiently.

That is no answer.

ELIZABETH

Hark!—Your Father's step upon the porch.

Straighten the loose strands of your hair! Take your lute,—and, if you be wise, sing a song of Israel and of Israel's God.

Alceda takes the lute and mischievously sings the fragment of a love song.

ALCEDA

Singing.

O sweeter than sweets of the honey-flower,
To the golden-throated bee—
As he sips her heart from hour to hour—
Is the breath of my love to me.

As Alceda sings, Jahdiel, the Pharisee, enters the Court. He is a tall, stern-looking man, well-named. He looks in very truth like the "Revenge of God" as his name implies. There is unrelenting severity about his face, which seems to change the atmosphere of the Court from a sunny playground to a place of punishment.

JAHDIEL

Sternly.

Silence! Am I to have a lute-playing idler for a daughter? Where is your distaff? What has become of your spinning?

Alceda is silent for a moment; a slight shiver passes over her frame; then she lifts her head.

ALCEDA

Aside.

Why should I be afraid as I have ever been since I was a child? I am a woman now, the betrothed of Tiberius.

She goes timidly towards him.

Will you kiss me, my Father?

JAHDIEL

Turning away from her.

Wanton wiles! You are the daughter of—her whose daughter you are. We will make an end of this. It is time for you to wed.

ALCEDA

The colour rising to her brow, her bosom swelling.

That I know, Father.

JAHDIEL

He comes, to-day, to meet you. Your marriage portion is large, and he has great possessions. In that, you are equal; but in other things—!

He breaks off suddenly like a snapped thread—after a moment he continues.

O God of Israel! I thank thee that thou hast found me worthy to send a careful Master to my House, who will take this wild olive for new grafting!

Alceda rises with dignity.

ALCEDA

And who is this careful Master who will take me for grafting?

JAHDIEL

It is Josephus, the Pharisee, a great man in Israel.

ALCEDA

With eyes dilating in surprise.

Josephus?—*Josephus?*—Father, you jest!

JAHDIEL

Do I look like a man who jests?

ELIZABETH

Aside.

About as much as he looks like a sporting-cock!

ALCEDA

Father, at Harvest time, you said it would be

well—as no Hebrew wanted me for wife—if I found a Roman home and took a Roman mate: you gave Tiberius, the Roman, the hope that he might woo me for his bride: he has wooed—and won!

JAHDIEL

Indignantly.

Tiberius? He is of that vile Roman tribe! He was well enough for your portion if no grapes grew in the vineyard. I was content to let an unsought maiden find a Roman bed, if no son of Israel would look upon her! It is not unlawful to play at odds with a Roman—they play their foxy game with us.

ALCEDA

Proudly.

And why should no son of Israel look upon me? I am not ill-favoured—and I am your daughter.

JAHDIEL

There is one who *has* looked upon you,—Jehovah be praised—Josephus! And he will stoop to wed you and raise up children, notwithstanding the blight upon my House.

ALCEDA

Quickly.

The blight?—The blight? What blight, Father?

Jahdiel turns on her a face terrible to see.

JAHDIEL

In a hissing tone.

Shall I tell you?

ALCEDA

Backing away from him and closing her eyes, as though about to swoon.

No!—No!—tell me not when you look like that.

JAHDIEL

There is no need to swoon—I had no thought to tell you. Josephus will be here at once. He well knows the blight upon my House and yet he takes you as you are.

ALCEDA

Recovering herself, with an air of audacity.

I do not know of any blight—and I will not take him as *he* is!

Jahdiel raises his hand as if to smite her, and then reconsiders the matter.

ALCEDA

With a shudder.

Father—I cannot wed Josephus. I am promised to Tiberius..

JAHDIEL

With irrevocable decision in his tone.

You are already the wife of Josephus—by my word!

ALCEDA

I am already the wife of Tiberius—by that same word: I will not wed Josephus!

JAHDIEL

You will not? Now, by the Law of Moses, you will obey your Father!

Steps can be heard.

He comes—mind your manners—be courteous —be hospitable—he is our guest.

A servant enters the Court, followed by Josephus. Josephus is the age of Jahdiel: he is superbly dressed, but his dress does not redeem the repel-

lent aspect of his face; it is long, narrow and sharp: he has a very sensual mouth with full hanging under lip and small eyes like a ferret's.

JAHDIEL

Welcome, Friend, to my poor house.

Turing to Alceda.

Alceda, here is a guest who honours our house by entering. Josephus, here is your hand-maiden.

Alceda bows with grace and dignity.

ALCEDA

Welcome, Sir, to my Father's house.

JOSEPHUS

O fairer than the daughters of Judea! Your eyes are fish-pools, and your lips have fed on honey.

Alceda flashes a scornful look at him and walks out of the Court.

Jahdiel motions Josephus to a seat.

JAHDIEL

Sit, Josephus. The day is warm. Alceda has gone for cooling drinks.

They sit on the seat amidst the oleanders.

And whilst you rest will you forget a while you are a Pharisee?

JOSEPHUS

What mean you by this sacrilege?

JAHDIEL

I mean, will you partake of Roman refreshment in the Roman manner which is threatening our austerity in these lax days?

JOSEPHUS

I am the strictest of my sect in the dogma of the synagogue, but—but—I sometimes yield to Roman ways—they are amusing.

JAHDIEL

There are some lively dancers I have mixed amongst the women-dancers of my house for entertainment. Herod hath set a strange new fashion at the Palace. I see you are very weary and, methought, perchance it might refresh you to indulge in new ways in these new days: the dancers are ready.

JOSEPHUS

Yes, I *am* weary. I will relax my wonted austerity.

Jahdiel claps his hands: a servant appears.

JAHDIEL

Bid the dancers come.

The servant goes out. A troop of beautiful maidens with cymbals dances in. Alceda returns and as they dance she serves her Father and her Father's guest, as is fitting for a Hebrew maiden, with wine and syrups: she then takes her seat on her marble bench, a little apart beneath a hanging rose-vine. The dancers sing as they dance:

Bind the flowers in your hair,
Strike the cymbals, maidens fair,
As your feet glide in and out
Wave your floating scarfs about;
Soft the tinkling love-bells ring,
Dance and sing, dance and sing.

Now your dancing feet keep time,
To the rhythm and the rhyme,
Of the cymbals' ecstasy.
Bright your shimmering scarfs wave free,

Soft the tinkling love-bells ring,
Dance and sing, dance and sing.

Josephus regards the dancing girls with a look like a satyr: he rubs his hands and smiles in sensuous enjoyment.

JOSEPHUS

It is a pleasant sight. You bring forth treasures for my coming, Jahdiel.

JAHDIEL

Naught is too fair to do you honour, Josephus.

JOSEPHUS

That little one with breasts like two does and limbs like ivory—who is she?

JAHDIEL

She is Rajah—from the East.

JOSEPHUS

I would see her dance an Eastern dance.

JAHDIEL

Rajah, dance an Eastern dance.

The others draw back and seat themselves on the grass. Rajah comes forward alone.

THE DANCING GIRLS

Singing as Rajah dances.

O joyous the hours,
When you dance 'mid the flowers,
With fairy-like feet,
Wafting fragrance so sweet.
Rajah—Rajah!

From East-land, afar,
You come like a star:
A twinkling delight
To gladden our sight,
Rajah—Rajah!

Exit the dancers.

JOSEPHUS

They know how to dance: our Hebrew girls are more beautiful but the women of the East have a better understanding of man's desire.

JAHDIEL

We of the sect of the Pharisees are not supposed to know desire.

JOSEPHUS

Giving Jahdiel a lascivious wink most unpleasant to see.

Man is man whatever his sect may be.

He turns to Alceda with a look in his eyes that comes from watching the dancing.

Rajah is fair but Alceda is taller and more fair.

Alceda draws her veil around her which partly conceals her face and her form.

ALCEDA

Proudly.

Rajah is a dancing girl from the heathen East: Alceda is a woman of Israel—the daughter of Jahdiel of the land of Judea.

JOSEPHUS

Turning to Jahdiel.

In truth her manners match her beauty.

JAHDIEL

With dignity.

She is my daughter.

Josephus draws near to Alceda, looks her over from her head to her feet with sensual eyes and reaches out his hand caressingly.

JOSEPHUS

Insinuatingly.

You find favour in my sight, fair maiden.

Alceda looks at him, sees the expression in his eyes which terrifies her: she steps back, drawing her veil around her.

ALCEDA

In a low strange voice unlike her own.

You do not find favour in my sight.

JOSEPHUS

Sharply.

That is unfortunate as you are to be my hand-maiden.

ALCEDA

Proudly.

It is far from my will and from my purpose!

JOSEPHUS

Smiling disagreeably.

You are a coy maiden—it is not unpleasant.

ALCEDA

I am a proud woman: I bid you farewell.

Alceda draws her veil more closely around her and turns to walk away.

JOSEPHUS

To Jahdiel, his anger rising.

Is it for this you lured me with promise and persuasion?

JAHDIEL

In anger to Alceda.

By what cool daring do you shame my house and contradict my words?

ALCEDA

Father—

Jahdiel smites Alceda on the mouth.

JAHDIEL

To Josephus.

She is but a midget with unruly buzz. We will tame her! All will be well. Come, let us leave her to her medicine; she will be purged and pliant by to-morrow.

They start to leave the Court: Jahdiel bows Josephus out first, then turns to Alceda who stands still with wide-open eyes, her hands motionless where they have dropped to her sides.

JAHDIEL

You hissing thing! I will instruct you in the Tables of the Law.

Elizabeth lifts her obsequious form; a new dignity comes upon her.

ELIZABETH

Indignantly to Jahdiel.

She is but a child—my little one—a child scarce weaned from the Mother she did not know,—and you have smitten her!

JAHDIEL

And I will smite you, also, and have you beaten with many stripes, you busy-body, if you do not hold your tongue!

Exit Jahdiel.

ELIZABETH

Tenderly.

My little lamb, my wounded lamb—come to my arms! Come lie upon my breast,—and feel the beating of my heart for you!

Alceda looks straight before her with wide-open, unseeing eyes; she does not move.

ALCEDA

In a tense voice.

He smote me on the mouth—

ELIZABETH

My lamb,—my little darling of the fold,—come, let me comfort you.

ALCEDA

He smote me on the mouth—He struck the lips Tiberius has kissed!—

ELIZABETH

Hoping to arouse her.

Comes not Tiberius to the house to-day?

Alceda starts, and throws off the lethargy that has held her.

ALCEDA

Eagerly.

Ah, yes—the hour is not far off. Come, wash my face and bind my hair and make me ready for my lord.—

She eagerly starts to go into the house with the nurse: stopping at the door she lays her hand upon the nurse's arm, with fascinating persuasion.

O Foster-mother, will you guard our speech—and warn me if my Father should return?—I think he will not come into the Court again today—but, who can tell? He always does the thing I least expect. Tiberius will be here at set of sun.

ELIZABETH

Fear not, my little lamb, I will watch, raven-eyed, and give the alarm if any comes to break upon your meeting hour. At set of sun, Tiberius will find you here amid the flowers, and out of the abundance of your two hearts, you may speak. The little Eastern gate is locked, and I will sit before the Southern gate and watch the main road.

Muttering to herself, aside.

Smite me—beat me with many stripes?—Indeed! A Hebrew woman is a burdened beast, but, peradventure the beast may kick and overturn the pile of treasure on her back.

Aloud.

Do not weep, my lamb.

ALCEDA

Drawing herself up proudly and brushing the tears from her eyelashes.

Weep?—And wherefore should I weep:—I am a child no longer.

ELIZABETH

Ay, ay.

Aside.

She has a spirit in her. She is no snivel-snavel. And what a look of her Mother is in her eyes, to-day!

ACT I

SCENE II

ACT I

SCENE II

The Court in the house of Jahdiel, the same as before. Alceda and Tiberius on the marble seat by the fountain.

Tiberius is a Centurion of high rank. He has the characteristic virility and commanding presence inherited from a long line of distinguished Romans; his fine profile and changing eyes hold a dream, inherited from his mother, who was a beautiful Greek.

ALCEDA

I thought the hours were a thousand years, until you came.

TIBERIUS

To me it has been æons. My vestal Love, the dawn is in your eyes, the dew of the morning is upon your lips, the purity of the northern snow upon your brow.

ALCEDA

Very seriously.

Tiberius—

TIBERIUS

Smiling.

What a solemn and alarming note,—"Tiberius"—you say my name as though you were Atropos.

ALCEDA

Atropos is one of your Fates, is she not?—

TIBERIUS

She it is who cuts the thread.

ALCEDA

That is what I must do—Cut the dear thread between us two—

TIBERIUS

Throwing back his fine head and laughing lightly.

As if you could!

ALCEDA

I cannot—but I must!

TIBERIUS

Read me your riddle.

ALCEDA

My Father has forbidden our love.

TIBERIUS

Your Father gave me his word that you should be my bride. You are the bride of my heart—no man can put us asunder now.

ALCEDA

Sorrowfully and simply.

He thought no son of Israel would marry me so he permitted me to think of a Roman although Rome is the enemy of Judea.

TIBERIUS

Surprised.

Are the men of Israel mad, dead, dull, or are they blind?

ALCEDA

Sorrowfully.

I know not why, but there is some strange mystery. I am unlike the maidens of my nation, Tiberius—the men of Judea shrink from me.

TIBERIUS

Ah! You are strange indeed to them. They

look for dull earth and they find sparkling fire—they look for a beast of burden and they find a winged bird—they look for virgin comeliness and they find the blinding beauty of a daughter of the Gods.

ALCEDA

That is the favour of your gracious eyes, Beloved, but the men of Judea do not find me beautiful, they turn away from me: but now there is one who does desire me, who will wed me—wherefore my Father has commanded me to marry him. And he would be wroth at me for meeting you—he would curse you, Tiberius.

TIBERIUS

Scornfully.

I am a Roman citizen—I fear not his curse.

ALCEDA

Frightened.

O Tiberius—you do not tremble? You fear not his curse?

TIBERIUS

No more than I fear the buzzing of foolish flies.

ALCEDA

He would marry me to Josephus—the Pharisee.

TIBERIUS

Indignantly.

To Josephus? Josephus? Why not to your fabled Methuselah?

ALCEDA

With unconscious satire.

Doubtless it would be he, were he living until now—for he would have great possessions—he would be very rich.

TIBERIUS

Playfully.

Will you be lured by riches to Josephus?

ALCEDA

I?—If he were master of every furlong of ground in Judea, if he were overlaid with gold, studded with all the jewels of the Orient, and capped with pearls of great price—I would not marry him!

TIBERIUS

Tenderly.

And Tiberius?

ALCEDA

If Tiberius were an humble worker in a vineyard, clad in goatskins—with but a penny a day—he would be my King! But— (*her voice becomes low and shy*) but not my husband—lest I break the Law.

Tiberius takes her hand and kisses it reverently.

TIBERIUS

The Law of Love is stronger than all laws—you are to be my wife, Alceda—my heart-loved wife.

There is a tense silence: Alceda's soul is in conflict.

ALCEDA

Your Gods are not my Gods, the Lord God of Israel alone is my God.

TIBERIUS

In Rome you may worship any God that you

desire—in whatever way you desire. Your God has made you what you are, I am content with Him.

ALCEDA

Much troubled.

I do not know—the way is not clear to me—His law is unalterable—"Honour thy Father and thy Mother:"—and yet—and yet—can I honour my Father, in truth, when that obedience is founded on a broken faith—a broken word—to you?

TIBERIUS

My sweet logician, who can say that women know not how to reason?

ALCEDA

Innocently.

Does any one dare to say that?

TIBERIUS

Smiling.

Some men have even dared to say it.

ALCEDA

With spirit.

They are quite wrong. We are the true logicians; we have no confusion from distraction as men have: we go straight to the heart of things.

TIBERIUS

Embracing her.

Yea, of all things; you go straight to my heart!

ALCEDA

Brokenly, continuing her thought aloud.

And then—in honouring my Father I must dishonour my Mother; he does not honour her—he never honours her.

The tears come to Alceda's eyes.

Tiberius, I have no mother.

TIBERIUS

My lovely Flower of the Mountains—your husband will encompass you, and you will know no need, not even of a mother's tenderness.

ALCEDA

O my Beloved!

There is silence in the Court for a few moments.

ALCEDA

Looking up suddenly.

Tiberius, have you seen the Nazarene, again?

TIBERIUS

Yes, I have seen Him, and each time I am the more convinced of His truth.

ALCEDA

Ah! He is true—I have rehearsed His words, His looks, His bearing—since that day we heard Him together. A strange sense stirred through me, then, as I looked upon Him. My heart said to me, "Here is a man who is not all a man: here is Truth incarnate in the flesh."

TIBERIUS

Thoughtfully.

My mind is divided about this Jesus. I do not feel that He is a stirrer-up of strife; but I fear He is an impractical dreamer who spins a web of wild folly, in which He catches the common folk to their undoing.

ALCEDA

I long to hear Him again but I fear my Fa-

ther: he thinks He is very evil and should be crucified.

TIBERIUS

With emphasis.

If Pilate should consent to that, he will be anathema in history. I think the man of Nazareth is partly mad, but even if He be mad, it is a harmless madness.

ALCEDA

Emphatically.

He is not mad—He, of all men, is most sane.

TIBERIUS

You say that with conviction.

ALCEDA

I know it! It seems as if Jehovah whispers it in my heart.

TIBERIUS

Reflecting.

Often I think He is mad. He says words of pure folly. Listen to the wild words I heard Him say but yesterday. The crowds were

thronging about Him: He stood upon the steps of the Temple; He was like one of the pillars in Solomon's porch, tall and straight. He lifted up His voice and cried: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."—Babbling words that no man could understand.

A glowing light comes into Alceda's eyes.

ALCEDA

Did He say that, Tiberius, did He say that? Oh! That is not folly! that is not madness!

TIBERIUS

And could my Alceda comprehend those words? If you are athirst, my Love, I have a potion in my lips for you.

ALCEDA

With sweet seriousness.

O Tiberius, too well I comprehend those words! There has ever been a longing—a thirst—in my soul: my soul pants as a hart panteth after the water-brooks—for something—something—to satisfy it—I cannot tell: always I have had it—always—always: when I

was a little child, as I reached toward the miracle of the rosy sunrise—toward the glory of the sunset—toward the shining splendour of the golden stars—toward the silver mystery of the silent moon. When all things beautiful spoke to me, when all things musical swept through me—the wind in the trees—the song of the brook—the solemn swell of the song in the Temple as it carried my thoughts away—always this thirst for something—I know not what. It is like sharp pain—I used to think that it was love I waited for, and, at first when you came and when you kissed me—I was content.

He attempts to embrace her—she stays him with uplifted hand.

No—no—not yet—let me tell you all—I want you to know my heart—your love *did* content me, but it did not stop that strange thirst within my soul. Sometimes—even when I am in your arms—when I am happiest in you, beyond all mortal telling—something rises in my soul—some passionate thirst—a longing for that which is beyond this earth—for clear water for my soul to drink which even you cannot

give me. It is as though I longed to drink of God. Perchance He—this Nazarene—can tell me where to find that for which my soul longs—even when I am happiest.

TIBERIUS

Tenderly.

My Flower of the Mountains, that thirst is very easy to comprehend. I can explain it to you. You were born for freedom, as the birds fly upward, and you are bound in shackles by the bondage—the institutions of this cursed country; your Church, your Laws, hold you in a prison of the spirit,—it is the longing of your soul to spread its wings against your heritage. I think the Nazarene understands this bondage of tradition: He wants to make men free.

ALCEDA

If He could lead me out from the bondage of the Church of Israel—and yet, let me keep my God—then, would I follow Him.

TIBERIUS

When you are my wife you shall be free as air: you may follow Him if you desire. We will

hear Him and weigh His words. If they be only of Earth, at least they will be a diversion to our minds: if He be a Prophet, and has come from the Gods, we will learn of Him together.

ALCEDA

Tenderly laying her hand upon Tiberius' arm.

Tiberius, I often think you are very near to God, so well you comprehend.

TIBERIUS

Solemnly.

When a man loves—he is always near to God.

The Nurse is heard singing in a high cracked voice.

ELIZABETH

Singing.

The little lamb wandered from the fold,
From the guarding shepherd's eye—

ALCEDA

Excitedly, springing to her feet.

Quick!—Quick!—Tiberius!—It is the sign—my Father is coming down the road!

TIBERIUS

Quietly.

I will await him here and speak with him. I have aught to say to him.

ALCEDA

Eagerly.

Oh, not now—not to-day—He is very angry—I did not tell you what happened this morning, before you came—He would kill you.

TIBERIUS

I am a Roman citizen!

ALCEDA

He does not care.

TIBERIUS

But he knows the consequences—he would not chance them.

ALCEDA

Then, he will kill me! Do not wait, oh, do not wait—you may come again, but not to-day—Go! Go, if you love me!

TIBERIUS

Rising.

By that command, I go!

ELIZABETH

Singing.

The little lamb wandered from the fold,
From the guarding shepherd's eye—

ALCEDA

Quick! The garden gate,—he comes by the highway—

She hurries him to the gate, and unlocks it with a key that hangs from her girdle; she opens the door, and, in agitation, tries to hurry him out.

TIBERIUS

Pausing on the threshold.

Beloved, you are mine?

ALCEDA

Trembling.

For ever and for ever. But wait a few days before you face my Father—until this storm is past.

TIBERIUS

You will not marry Josephus?

ALCEDA

Never!—Quick, Tiberius! Go;—he comes.

Exit Tiberius.

Alceda goes swiftly into the house.

ACT I

SCENE III

ACT I

SCENE III

The next day. The Court the same as before. David, playing on his flute. Enter Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

Still the toot-tooting on that foolish flute?

DAVID

Impudently.

Still the wag-wagging of that foolish tongue?

ELIZABETH

Have you done your work?

DAVID

Do you not see how hard I toil?

Elizabeth walks over to the seat and picks up a scarf and a little bag.

ELIZABETH

Come, carry these things into the house and tidy up the Court—a guest comes, shortly.

DAVID

Who is it?

ELIZABETH

Never you mind.

DAVID

Who is it?

ELIZABETH

Josephus.

DAVID

Josephus, the Pharisee? I will not tidy up the Court for him: I do not like him!

ELIZABETH

Like him or no like him, he is a friend of the Master.

DAVID

Winking.

He doesn't come here to see the Master.

ELIZABETH

How do you know?

DAVID

He has his ferret eyes on Alceda.

ELIZABETH

Who cannot resist the opportunity of a little gossip.

Ha! He wants to marry her.

DAVID

Marry her? Marry her? Mighty Moses! Do jackals marry nightingales?

ELIZABETH

He'll not marry her! be at rest. She'll not have him!

DAVID

I will break his precious neck for him before he marries her.

David begins to play upon his flute again.

ELIZABETH

That flute keeps piping like the wind in winter.

David, suddenly, is attracted by something in the grass: he gets up and looks at it and when Elizabeth's head is turned he picks up a lizard and mischievously holds it behind him and walks over to where Elizabeth has taken a seat. He leans over her shoulder from the back and says:

DAVID

Don't be cross, Elizabeth.

At the same time he puts the lizard on her back where it begins to crawl up toward her neck.

ELIZABETH

I'll not be cross if you'll behave yourself.

DAVID

Shall I tell you a story, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

Gruffly.

Go on.

DAVID

Once there was a lizard—a nice, soft, slimy, fat, green lizard—alas! he was possessed of a devil.

ELIZABETH

Hear the boy! It makes my ears ache to hear him talk.

DAVID

I'll be silent, then.

ELIZABETH

Go on about your lizard.

DAVID

This lizard was quite mad: he could not see the country round about because the walls were too high and shut in the garden: at last one day he saw a high hill—so high that he thought he could see the world from the top of it, so he began to climb and climb and crawl and crawl.

David is watching the lizard as it begins to crawl up Elizabeth's back.

ELIZABETH

Why are you looking at me like that?

DAVID

Laughing.

Because you are so beautiful.

ELIZABETH

You little black-eyed viper!

DAVID

The lizard climbed and climbed and crawled and crawled. The hill was very slippery and hard to travel: he knew that it was a dangerous hill but high up at the top of it he saw some-

thing all soft and white—not white exactly but yellow-white. It made the lizard very curious to see what it was: he said within himself, "If I can reach that white landing place, perhaps, I can see the world," so he moved his slimy little green legs faster and faster—but a lizard is very slow and the little white place looked miles away: he did not know what it was—but I will tell you what it was—it was the neck of Elizabeth!

Elizabeth jumps up and screams and begins to try to reach her back.

ELIZABETH

Where is it? Where is it? Take it off—take it off! Oh, you young devil, take it off!

She jumps around in a wild way in trying to get rid of the lizard which she cannot reach: at that moment she feels the feet of the lizard upon her neck. David throws back his head and laughs loudly.

DAVID

Singing.

Oh, joyous the hours,
That you dance 'mid the flowers,
Rajah! Rajah!

Elizabeth continues to jump around as she throws off the lizard: then she runs after David who, laughing, escapes her: he runs out of the main gate of the garden. Elizabeth with lifted hand runs after him.

ELIZABETH

In a loud threatening voice.

You son of Beelzebub!

At this moment Josephus, very stern and solemn, enters the gate.

JOSEPHUS

Woman! Is this a seemly welcome to a friend's house?

ELIZABETH

Making a low obeisance.

Forgive me, Sir. I did not know of your presence.

JOSEPHUS

Is it your custom to stand at the gate of the house and cry aloud to Beelzebub?

ELIZABETH

It is my custom to chase devilish boys out of the gate.

JOSEPHUS

I saw no boy.

ELIZABETH

He ran out as you came in.

JOSEPHUS

I saw no boy.

ELIZABETH

Startled.

He vanished like smoke! Verily he *is* a son of Satan.

JOSEPHUS

Where is your Mistress? Your Master told me I should find her in the Court.

ELIZABETH

It is beyond the hour that she was to come into the Court. I will tell her that you await her here.

Elizabeth goes into the house to find Alceda.

JOSEPHUS

Alceda is coming: her beauty moves the sluggish blood within my veins. I would hasten

the time to possess her: a kiss from her ruby lips will warm my blood—the thought of it stirs that cold stream even now: and her soft hands toying about my neck will quicken my dulled pulses: she will be hard to manage for she inherits high spirits as well as fair flesh—but I will not spare the rod when it is necessary and if the rod upon her flesh fails to do its work—(*he smiles*) then I have a rod to hold over her spirit that will not fail. Her Father says she does not know—but that ignorance shall be ended soon. Upon her bridal night, after I have had my pleasure with her, I will tell her the ghastly tale: it will terrify her, and serve to keep her virtuous.

Enter Alceda.

ALCEDA

Proudly.

My Father said that you would speak with me.

JOSEPHUS

Bowing low—in a patronising voice.

You know the purport of my coming! I have decided to make you my wife and the mother of my sons!

ALCEDA

Verily, a weighty decision for a man—without consideration of the woman he has chosen.

Josephus puts his hand into his garments and brings out a string of magnificent rubies, which he offers to Alceda.

JOSEPHUS

Here are some baubles for you to play with, Maiden; they are worth a king's ransom.

Alceda's hands drop motionless to her sides; she looks at Josephus with quiet scorn.

ALCEDA

I give you thanks, but I may not take the jewels! They are for bartering; I am not a thing offered in the market-place, I am not sold for rubies!

Josephus looks at Alceda in surprise and anger.

JOSEPHUS

They are not for bartering; they are for the wife of Josephus: and many others wait for her like them, save in colour—diamonds, sapphires, and many stones of flashing beauty.

ALCEDA

Alceda has naught to do with the wife of Josephus nor with her jewels.

JOSEPHUS

Alceda and my wife are the same—by the word of Jahdiel. Come, come, my beauty, give me those lips.

ALCEDA

Not if I lengthen my life—by so doing.

He steps toward her.

JOSEPHUS

I will not longer wait for the kiss that I desire.

ALCEDA

If you reach my lips they will be the cold lips of a corpse.

JOSEPHUS

You refuse to be my wife?

ALCEDA

I was not made for dotards—nor for those who have sacrificed for years to a carnal god.

Josephus' eyes narrow; he looks more like a ferret than ever.

JOSEPHUS

You are brazen for one so young.

ALCEDA

With new dignity.

You take liberties—for one so old!

JOSEPHUS

With venom in his speech.

It is not for *you* to refuse an honourable mate: the daughter of Rachel the sinner may not pick and choose!

ALCEDA

Poignantly.

My Mother—?

JOSEPHUS

In a snarling tone.

Ay, your Mother!

ALCEDA

Slowly, as though speaking against her will.

What of my Mother?

JOSEPHUS

Looking at Alceda narrowly and speaking slowly.

I will tell you of your Mother: she broke the Law, she was stoned without the Walls: she lay a bruised and bleeding mass for vultures—as was meet for such an one—and yet I will marry her daughter!

Alceda puts her hand to her heart, and leans against a tree.

ALCEDA

In a tense voice.

O God in Heaven—it is not true!

JOSEPHUS

Ay, it is true. Her daughter is disgraced—but I will take her to wife, for her Father's sake, (*aside*) and for her beauty's sake—she is very desirable.

ALCEDA

O God in Heaven, can it be true?

JOSEPHUS

Ay, it is true, I tell you; I was there! I watched it all. I saw the deed of justice done—I saw her die—it was a sight of terror and of blood: the beauty that had led to her undoing was a bruised and bleeding mass of—

Alceda starts out of her lethargy, a fury blazes within her: she looks upon Josephus as though she would scorch him.

ALCEDA

In a tone of ringing command.

Out of my sight,—you fiend of Hell! Before I pluck from out your head the wanton eyes that looked upon that scene—if it were true!

JOSEPHUS

Shrugging his shoulders.

Ah! I go, with thanksgiving to be rid of you! I should have known that a serpent's offspring will always hiss at last!

ALCEDA

Go, you whited sepulchre, full of stale and filthy sins!

Exit Josephus: enter Elizabeth.

Alceda stands as though turned to stone—motionless, silent.

ELIZABETH

What have they done to you, my lamb?

Alceda does not answer; Elizabeth goes up to her, takes her hands and chafes them.

Speak to me, my lambkin, speak to me!—I nursed you on my breast.

ALCEDA

As though in a dream, to herself.

Rachel—my Mother—a sinner!—Stoned without the Walls—stoned without the Walls!

ELIZABETH

In a voice of terror.

God of my Fathers—who has told you this thing?

Alceda turns quickly and seizing Elizabeth's arm, holds it as if in a vice.

ALCEDA

Is it true?—Elizabeth, is it true?

Elizabeth stands silent with bowed head.

ALCEDA

In a tone of despair.

You dare not lie!—It is true!—and I—and I —am—Oh, Tiberius!

Alceda throws herself upon the ground, buries her face on her arms and begins to sob. Elizabeth goes to her and bends over her.

ELIZABETH

Hush! my little lamb, hush you. Do not lie upon the hard ground. Come to my arms.

Alceda still sobs and pays no attention to Elizabeth. Elizabeth sits on one of the marble seats and looks at her in despair.

Come, and I will tell you of your Mother!

Alceda stops sobbing and rises quickly: she runs to Elizabeth, falls on her knees, clasping her hands on Elizabeth's lap.

ALCEDA

Tell me! You never would tell me. I teased you so often, but you never would.

ELIZABETH

I never could! You did not know the awful truth and your Father bade me be silent, under pain of parting from you and, therefore, I never spoke.

ALCEDA

Quick! I wait. Tell me, now!

ELIZABETH

I came with your Mother from her Father's house in Lebanon, when she was brought to

Jahdiel—a bride—and I was with her to the end.

ALCEDA

Tell me of her!

ELIZABETH

She was as beautiful as night: her eyes were like twin stars: her lips were like scarlet berries in the sunshine, and they laughed always. She was a singing bird, and her voice echoed through the halls of the house and through the courts, from early morning to evening, until Jahdiel silenced her. When you were coming, a new joy possessed her—she was very glad. Sometimes, she would throw herself into my arms and say: "Elizabeth, perhaps my child may be the Messiah—" and then we would talk and dream of so great a glory.

ALCEDA

Sorrowfully.

And when I came, I was only a girl, after all.

ELIZABETH

You were only a girl after all. That was a thing which Jahdiel could not forgive. Time

went on; a stranger came from Damascus, he was often at the house: Rachel talked less and less to me; she seemed to have a secret which she kept hidden in her heart. Jahdiel grew more and more pitiless to her—and then the end!

ALCEDA

Tell me of the end!

ELIZABETH

No, my lamb, you do not want to hear of that.

ALCEDA

It is of that I want to hear!

ELIZABETH

I cannot tell you, for I know it not! I was not there. The last I saw of her, great men of the Synagogue were on either side of her: they led her out through that gate (*pointing to the large gate*). Jahdiel stood watching. My heart yearned over her and I started to go to her, but Jahdiel held me back and said in stern tones: "Hence, woman! Rachel has broken the law and if you would keep the law, yourself, you will not countenance her nor speak to her,

but let her bear the burden of her sin." Your Mother turned and faced me where I stood. I shall never forget the look in her eyes—it was the look of death in life, but there was not a trace of fear. With a loud voice, she cried: "Elizabeth, your promise! Take care of my Alceda!" Then she walked through the gate with head high lifted: and I went into the house, and took you into my arms, and prayed to the great Jehovah that I might be a mother to the little motherless child.

ALCEDA

And you have been a mother to me, always, my Elizabeth! (*In a low tone.*) Was she stoned, Elizabeth? Was my Mother *really* stoned?

ELIZABETH

I suppose so, I never asked! They told me she had sinned with the man she loved—the man who loved her!

ALCEDA

Sobbing.

O my Mother! My Mother! My poor, beau-

tiful Mother! (*After a pause.*) Where was he, Elizabeth—the man she loved?—the man who brought her to that pass? Did he not fight to save her?—Was he not stoned beside her?

ELIZABETH

No, no, my child. Men are not often stoned for love—it is the women who are always stoned for love!

ALCEDA

Is it not as wicked for a man to sin, as it is for a woman to sin?

ELIZABETH

That is a thing I have never been able to understand. I have pondered it long; the man usually escapes: it seems to me *more* wicked for the man—he is the one who tempts. He whispers in her ear, like Satan, things that the woman has never thought of: but the priests say not so. Man is man and woman is woman!

ALCEDA

I do not think men tempt us. It is only that

they are strong we trust them utterly. Love is so very sweet!

ELIZABETH

Ah! you do not know men! They are all alike: their hearts are evil!

ALCEDA

And women are their mothers! If men are evil, it is woman's fault. Why does she not make men different?—she has the shaping of them. But, oh, it is hard for woman to be alone in the stoning!

Alceda raises her head and after a brief pause says with a light breaking over her face.

There is justice in the great injustice, after all! The apocalyptic glory comes to woman: she is the mother of sons, the ecstasy is hers, and as she has the greater glory she also must keep the greater care, she should also have the finer virtue. I have always thought that when I had sons—but now, oh, now—I must forgo my life!

ELIZABETH

Do you think you must, my lamb?

ALCEDA

In deep sorrow.

Yes—I am a child of my Mother! I share her punishment! I am cut off from all things! Elizabeth, I must go to meet Tiberius and tell him we must part! No one can bear that message to him,—I must take it to him myself. I will meet him on the way. He is coming to the house to-morrow. Will you watch in the Court for me whilst I am gone?

ELIZABETH

I will watch, my lamb! If you must go, you must! (*Aside.*) It were well that she should be saved from Rome! (*Alceda sobs.*) Do not weep, my Nursling! Do not weep—all will be well!

ALCEDA

Looking up through her tears.

Do all men blame women? Do all men think that the woman is to blame, and that she should be stoned?

ELIZABETH

Our Father Adam told Jehovah that the

woman had tempted him, and since the time of Adam all men have said the same thing.

ALCEDA

Aside.

O Tiberius! How can I bear your condemnation of my Mother, when I tell you of her sin?

ACT II

SCENE I

ACT II

SCENE I

The next day: noon. A resting seat in a grove of trees, on the edge of the road, about half a furlong from the House of Jahdiel, the Pharisee.

Tiberius is sitting on the seat, and looking down the road.

TIBERIUS

A messenger met me here, and stopped my speeding. He bade me wait; he said that Alceda would come to me. It were better that I had gone to her Father's house, but I obey, and await her coming: when I have talked with her then will I go and face him to say my say—this time I will have my own way —it is the wiser.

Alceda comes down the road, closely veiled; Tiberius rises and walks toward her, with outstretched hand.

TIBERIUS

Beloved!

ALCEDA

In a dead, colourless voice.

I have come to tell you you must never enter my Father's house—you must never ask him for me—there is no need.

TIBERIUS

In a tone of anxiety.

My Flower of the Mountains, my Heart of Hearts—what has befallen you?

ALCEDA

I have dared all things to meet you, here—you must not see my Father—there is no need, Tiberius, we *must* part!

TIBERIUS

Tossing his head proudly.

Part?—When the sun falls from heaven and all the stars are out of place, then shall we part!

ALCEDA

In a lifeless tone of deep sorrow.

My sun has fallen from heaven, Tiberius, and all my stars are out of place!

TIBERIUS

'Tis then you need me, little Flower.

ALCEDA

Tensely, still in a colourless tone as though she had schooled herself for this moment.

Tiberius, my Mother—my Mother—

TIBERIUS

What of your Mother?

ALCEDA

O Tiberius, she was a sinner.

TIBERIUS

Reassuringly.

Then she but shared the lot of the world: we are *all* sinners, Alceda.

ALCEDA

With wild-eyed terror.

My Mother was the worst of sinners—Tiberius —I have come to tell you a dreadful thing— Oh! how can I tell it—help me, Jehovah! My Mother was stoned without the Walls of Jerusalem.

TIBERIUS

Quietly.

And if she were?

Alceda looks at him eagerly, surprised at his quiet tone.

ALCEDA

I am her daughter—

TIBERIUS

Taking her hand.

My lovely Lily of the Mountains, come home to my heart!

ALCEDA

Despairingly.

Tiberius, you do not understand—you do not know what that means.

TIBERIUS

I do understand—I know too well. It means the cursed cruelty of Israel.

ALCEDA

It means that I must give you up.

TIBERIUS

Tenderly.

And do you think that you can give me up?

ALCEDA

Oh, how can I! But it must be.

TIBERIUS

Have you forgotten your word, Alceda—"for ever and for ever"?

ALCEDA

In a tone of deep sorrow.

Forgotten?—O Tiberius! For ever and for ever I will love you—when the firmament has been rolled together as a scroll—when eternity is past I will love you—but I will never bear you sons to read that record in their Mother's House!

TIBERIUS

Proudly.

My sons have Roman records to read; and in the eyes of their Mother, they will see God.

ALCEDA

Tiberius,—where learned you your grace?

TIBERIUS

From you, Beloved, you are embodied grace.

ALCEDA

Sorrowfully.

You must not love me—I am the daughter of a sinner.

TIBERIUS

"I must not love you"? I love you more than ever, if that be possible. I will never let you go.

ALCEDA

But there is a blight upon me—my Mother was stoned without the Walls!

TIBERIUS

Somewhat sternly.

Hush, Alceda! If that be so, it was from some unjust suspicion—the cruel bitterness of your hard Mosaic Law; it was the ruthlessness of men: it was no fault of your Mother.

ALCEDA

Looking up with eager hope in her eyes.

Do you think that? Do you really think she may have been innocent?

TIBERIUS

O you who are whiter than lilies—purer than new-fallen snow, I have but to look in your face to *know* it, I have but to look in your heart to be sure of it. Your *blessed* Mother!

Alceda looks at him gratefully, adoringly—then speaks hesitatingly.

ALCEDA

My Father thought she should be stoned.

TIBERIUS

Where was his mercy?

ALCEDA

Ah—where?

TIBERIUS

When a man forgets his mercy, he is no longer just.

ALCEDA

O Tiberius, what if it were true?

TIBERIUS

It was a passing shadow, Alceda: sin is but a shadow: the light of the Omnipotent dispels all darkness.

He puts his hand under her chin and turns her face upward.

My Love, lift up your eyes to me, so! Now, listen and obey me, go home and rest —to-morrow I will come to meet your Father— then will I claim you by the force of Rome!

ALCEDA

Frightened.

Oh! never that way!

TIBERIUS

No, not that way, you are right; no public means for private ends. I will claim you by the power of my love!

ALCEDA

My Father knows no more of love than a blind man knows of the sun!

TIBERIUS

I will find a way to open his eyes! You are mine by all the powers of life and death—and after death! I may not kiss you, here. We are upon the open high-road. But my spirit kisses yours.

ALCEDA

Tiberius, you have comforted me! Our mighty Prophet said that God comforted him, "as one whom his mother comforteth"—I never found it so with God, even though I asked and asked of Him—He is so far away—but you comfort me even so.

TIBERIUS

Tenderly.

It may be that your God sent me to you to do it for Him.

ALCEDA

Tiberius, I think that may be true!

TIBERIUS

Thoughtfully.

The Nazarene says it is true.

ALCEDA

Eagerly.

What says He?

TIBERIUS

He says we show God to one another, that God is in us, and when we show kindness and mercy, and when we give comfort and help to another then we reveal Him.

ALCEDA

Thoughtfully.

This Jesus says very wonderful things.

TIBERIUS

He is as keen as an eagle, as wise as a serpent, as gentle as a dove! I wish I could make up my mind about Him.

ALCEDA

If He is all those things, is it not enough to hear His words, and to remember them?

TIBERIUS

My Minerva, you also are very wise: that is true.

From time to time in every land, in every religion, messengers have come from the Gods to testify to the great verities of life eternal. Certain of our teachers and our philosophers have made the everlasting truths more clear to us. Now comes this Nazarene with His philosophy of renewal, of rebirth. He is so chaste, so pure, so consecrated, He can divine the truth: He knows that sin is but a passing shadow, not a finality; He knows the future is ours: we are the children of to-morrow; we should never be stoned for our yesterdays—if we have repented of them.

Nature teaches us a great lesson—every morning, after the dark night, the sun rises and it is a new day; and always, after the darkness of sin, there comes the forgiveness of the Most High, the great Creator of the Universe, to absolve us—and it is a new day for the soul. I am convinced that your Mother broke no law—that she committed no sin; but even if she did, I *know* she, at once, repented: the sin rests upon those who stoned her. The Nazarene would not have stoned her: He would never stone a sinner. Every time I have heard Him,

He has spoken of forgiveness—forgiveness: He would gather *all* sinners in His arms, "as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings" —a striking metaphor He used the other day.

ALCEDA

Greatly agitated.

Compassion — comprehension — forgiveness —living water! Tiberius, I will follow Him!

TIBERIUS

I am not yet persuaded. I am a man and a Roman, I am partly Greek—I must weigh well before I decide: but this one thing I do know, the man is true!

ALCEDA

Ah! He is true! He is divine.

TIBERIUS

Farewell, Alceda. It is not well for you to linger longer here. To-morrow, I will come to demand my bride—and then—to Rome, to comfort, happiness and joy!

He points to a flowering bush near by.

I may not give you those glowing flowers of

the East in your new home, but violets are sprinkled in the grass, and in my garden there are fragrant, fragile blossoms that will crown your hair—when you are weary of jewels.

ALCEDA

Remembering the rubies.

Jewels?—they are for bondwomen!

TIBERIUS

My Stone of Crystal without flaw, when any jewel comes near you, its lustre is dimmed!

ALCEDA

Farewell, Tiberius—I am comforted!

TIBERIUS

In a tone of command.

And you must be also strengthened. Look in my eyes, Alceda! Remember, you are the betrothed wife of a Roman: the power of Rome is behind you and about you! You are not to fear what these Hebrews may do to you.

ALCEDA

You do not know my Father, Jahdiel, the Pharisee!

She gives him her hand, then turns and walks quickly down the road: Tiberius looks after her, with great tenderness in his eyes.

TIBERIUS

Beside the Roman maidens with their worldly wiles, she is like one of the white star flowers that grow amid the snows, on the summit of the Apennines!

ACT II

SCENE II

ACT II

SCENE II

The same day, later. The Court in Jahdiel's House: Elizabeth, sitting at her work.
Enter Jahdiel.

JAHDIEL

Where is your Mistress?

Elizabeth does not answer.

JAHDIEL

Where is Alceda?

Elizabeth does not answer.

JAHDIEL

Angrily.
Are you a Hebrew woman or a mummy of the Nile, you plague-spot of an hireling?

ELIZABETH

Let me alone until I swallow down my spittle.

I cannot answer when your questions fly swifter than a weaver's shuttle!

JAHDIEL

I have asked you but one question. Where is Alceda?

ELIZABETH

Perchance, she is in the house.

JAHDIEL

With a snarl.

Perchance, she is in Sheol! You have ceased to guard her. Your usefulness in my house is ended. When the Passover is finished, you will be turned out of doors.

The Nurse gives a long, low moan.

ELIZABETH

I have held her on my knees, I have held her at my breast, I have taught her little feet to walk, I have taught her little lips to speak.

JAHDIEL

Severely.

You have taught her little feet to walk on the

highways, you have taught her little lips to speak blasphemy!

ELIZABETH

Protestingly.

Blasphemy? Now, by the Lord God of Hosts, that I have not!

JAHDIEL

I have heard to-day from Josephus, who heard it from another, that she has been seen gadding about after the accursed Nazarene, and echoing some of His pestilential talk.

ELIZABETH

Alarmed.

Jehovah forbid! That must be stopped!

JAHDIEL

Grimly.

I will stop it, have no fear! Go into the house and attend to your business!

Elizabeth hesitates.

When I command, you are to obey!

Exit Elizabeth.

JAHDIEL

The lingering perfidy of Rachel haunts this house: the child, the nurse—all are tainted by the poison of her trail!

The grating sound of a key, turning in the lock, is heard.

JAHDIEL

Ha! Ha! I will hide and keep my watch.

He goes behind an oleander bush. The gate opens slowly; Alceda, closely veiled, enters and closes the gate behind her; she locks it with the key at her girdle; she looks around the Court, then throws back her veil.

ALCEDA

Ah! I am safe!

Jahdiel springs out from the oleander bush and grasps her arm with a grip of steel.

JAHDIEL

Yea, verily, from henceforth you are safe!

Alceda, frightened, turns very pale and sways for a moment: then she rallies and speaks with the new dignity born of her hour with Tiberius.

ALCEDA

My wrist is not a turning pin to wrench—let it free!

JAHDIEL

Still holding the wrist.

What I do, I do!

Alceda stands still: Jahdiel still holds her wrist.

ALCEDA

Calmly.

I await your words.

JAHDIEL

You have outraged my friend, Josephus.

ALCEDA

Quietly.

I have prevented his outraging me.

JAHDIEL

He would have wed you.

ALCEDA

That may never be.

JAHDIEL

We will see about that! You have been to meet Tiberius upon the highway.

ALCEDA

Tiberius is my betrothed husband—he had your consent to woo me—it is fitting we should meet.

JAHDIEL

You are to give him up!

ALCEDA

That I will never do!

JAHDIEL

Furthermore, you have been to hear this pestilential Nazarene, who blasphemingly declares that He is God!

ALCEDA

Fearlessly.

Yes, I have been to hear Him—if He be not God, He is a messenger from God, and I desire to learn of Him.

JAHDIEL

Silence, or I will strike you where you stand!

ALCEDA

With cool tensity.

Not again!

JAHDIEL

Again, and again, and again!

ALCEDA

Let me go—Father.

JAHDIEL

Not until you have answered me. Hark to my word, if you have ears to hear. I have a balance to strike with you. If you will never see Tiberius again, if you will wed Josephus—who is generous enough to take you, even yet, for he knows that he can tame you—if you will give me your promise never to see that Nazarene blasphemer again—then I will let you go!

ALCEDA

Very quietly, but with tensity.

None of these three things will I do!

JAHDIEL

With concentrated fury.

Then I will not let you go! You have defied me and I will give you measure for measure!

He grasps her other wrist; a great trembling shakes her: Elizabeth appears—she keeps the trees between herself and Jahdiel but listens and watches with agitation.

ALCEDA

Terrified.

Father—whither will you take me?

JAHDIEL

Within the house there is the little cell which I had built for the unruly servants. There you shall stay until you have found a better mind, a better answer!

He drags her off: she is as a thistle-down before the blast.

ALCEDA

In a voice of despair.

Tiberius!

JAHDIEL

Laughing snarlingly.

Let be! We shall see if Tiberius will come to you!

Jahdiel drags Alceda off. Exeunt Jahdiel and Alceda.

ELIZABETH

God of my Fathers! She is lost, my little lamb: gone to that foul cell! I cannot comfort her—I cannot reach her. If I had spoken Jahdiel would have banished me and I must linger near for any chance to help Alceda. What shall I do! What shall I do!

She sinks weeping on Alceda's seat and passes her hand lovingly over the lute.

ELIZABETH

O little lute—all silent now—your strings will break even as my heart breaks.

Enter David: he creeps silently through the Court up to Elizabeth and begins to laugh.

DAVID

You fat-foolishness—who is a heathen now, bending the knee to idols? You don't bend

your knee because you can't—you're too fat—but you are worshipping that lute as much as I did.

ELIZABETH

You son of Beelzebub! My heart is broken!

DAVID

Laughing.

Your heart is broken, is it? I'll warrant me it is for some gay young Israelite.

ELIZABETH

Moaning.

Oh, Alceda! Alceda!

DAVID

Startled.

What's the matter with Alceda?

ELIZABETH

Sobbing.

He has killed her! He has killed her!

DAVID

Impatiently.

Killed her?—Killed Alceda—Who?—Where?—When?—tell me at once.

ELIZABETH

Lifting her hand protestingly.

Hush! Hush!

DAVID

If you don't tell me this minute, I will scream.

He begins to scream.

ELIZABETH

Eagerly.

In the name of Jacob, hush! You will stir up a commotion and all will be lost. If you are quiet we may save her. I will tell you all. Come near, sit at my feet, give me your ear—perchance you can help.

DAVID

Anxiously.

Save her? Is there danger?

ELIZABETH

Ah! You begin to believe me.

DAVID

Quick! You fat-foolishness! You are slower than the snails that crawl upon the wall.

Elizabeth continues to sob.

ELIZABETH

'Tis no good to tell you—your brains are mixed with mud.

DAVID

Ingratiatingly.

Oh, come, Elizabeth! You are not so very slow after all and you are not so very fat. Why do you cry? Tell me, you quick Elizabeth—you thin Elizabeth! Please tell me.

ELIZABETH

Despairingly in a tense voice.

He has taken her!—Jahdiel has taken her!—and locked her in the cell beneath the eaves.

DAVID

Starting up.

Alceda, my Mistress? My beautiful Mistress?

ELIZABETH

Hush! Hush! What shall we do?

DAVID

Suspiciously.

You are not playing any sorry game with me?

ELIZABETH

Indignantly, through her sobs.

Do I cry for a joke? Would I play a game with death?

DAVID

We will save her—trust me!

ELIZABETH

How?

DAVID

I know a way to open locks.

ELIZABETH

Drying her eyes.

I'll wager you know how to open locks. You were ever a sly one and a sharp one!

DAVID

It is well just now that I am! We must bide our time: I must study the door and the lock whilst you watch that human devil.

ELIZABETH

Jahdiel is a devil without doubt, but it is too good for him to call him human.

DAVID

Come, we will go and plan the escape at once —or, at least, to-morrow, when all is made ready.

ACT II

SCENE III

ACT II

SCENE III

The next day. The Court, the same as before.
Jahdiel, the Pharisee, splendidly attired in robes of ceremony, Tiberius, the Roman, in the dress of a noble Roman Centurion—are seated on a marble seat.

JAHDIEL

With honeyed sweetness.

You desire speech of me?

TIBERIUS

Speech of great import to myself—and you!

JAHDIEL

Looking at him narrowly.

Peradventure, you are concerned with an affair of state?

TIBERIUS

Rather an affair of the heart.

JAHDIEL

Hearts do not lie in my jurisdiction.

TIBERIUS

Wherefore, we will not dwell upon that issue. I would speak with you on a question of faith in dealing.

JAHDIEL

Ay.

TIBERIUS

I have heard it rumoured that Pharisees devour widows' houses, that they grind down those who trust in them, and that their word is a reed to be broken, a slight thing to be snapped.

JAHDIEL

With menace in his tone.

The house of a Pharisee is scarce a fitting place to echo the lying buzz of busybodies concerning Pharisees!

TIBERIUS

With marked politeness.

Sir, it is the fitting place to repeat those things

as idle tales which I condemn. I tell it that I may, also, tell you that Tiberius believes it not—he would resent the rumour.

JAHDIEL

Sarcastically.

Most wise and generous Roman!

TIBERIUS

With deference.

I am convinced—whatever men may say to the contrary—that with a Pharisee, a bargain is a bargain, a promise is a promise, in Judea as in Rome.

JAHDIEL

Sarcastically.

Your discernment is most excellent: surely wisdom will die with you!

TIBERIUS

With dignity.

You promised me your daughter—five months gone by.

JAHDIEL

With crafty gentleness.

You, who are so wise, know well, Sir, I made no promises! I but said that you might woo my daughter and that *perhaps* you might wed her: there is a difference.

TIBERIUS

Hiding the rising anger under a most courteous exterior.

You meant that I might dangle as a carp upon a hook, whilst you were testing the stream for other fish?

JAHDIEL

With a most ingratiating manner.

Sir, you do me wrong! I but held a possibility before your eyes—and before my own—whilst I awaited the event.

After a moment, he continues with apparent hesitation.

I will speak truth with you:—I am a Pharisee, the strictest of my sect; I pay my tithes; I am not as other men: the Lord God of Hosts is my God. I ask you, as an honourable Roman, is it not fitting that I should want my child,

my one ewe lamb, the sole daughter of my House, to wed one whose God is my God, whose people are my people?

TIBERIUS

With characteristic honesty.

'Tis so I should desire for a daughter of my own House.

JAHDIEL

With a marked effort, as though he would be honest at any cost.

There are—there are grave reasons—not for your ears; sorrows, which I may not confide to a stranger—wherefore I thought that none of my people would desire to take my daughter to wife: I did not want her to be unwedded, because a childless woman is a reproach in Israel. Alceda is a maiden of tender heart, she will sorely need an husband when I am gathered to my Fathers. I thought, if you could win her, I might, *perchance,* consent: I had not faced the issue, but before the matter was accomplished, a mighty man in Israel, to my surprise and satisfaction, desired her

to wife—and offered me his hand for her. I ask you, Sir, in honesty, am I obliged to stay committed to a passing possibility?

TIBERIUS

With stern decision.

She shall not wed Josephus!

JAHDIEL

Looking at him narrowly and unpleasantly.

How know you it is Josephus?

TIBERIUS

Controlling himself.

I know Josephus—he is lean and hungry and he has seen Alceda!—he shall not have her!

JAHDIEL

Smiling sweetly with his lips, with hatred in his eye.

Doubtless the power of Rome is infinite.

TIBERIUS

I speak not of the power of Rome—I speak of my possession of her heart, my claim to her hand.

JAHDIEL

I admit no claim founded on a bare possibility —which you interpret as a promise.

TIBERIUS

I beg, Sir, that you will bear with me whilst I recount my worth.

JAHDIEL

Doubtless you are a very noble Roman.

TIBERIUS

With barbed courtesy.

I mean not my qualities of mind and heart. I would recount for your consideration my wealth and my power. I have vast estates in Rome and in the country round about. I have silver untold, and gold uncounted. I have jewels—

JAHDIEL

Interrupting him with a magnificent air of entire indifference to material things.

These weigh not one farthing in the scale. You have not the Lord God of Israel on your side!

TIBERIUS

I have the God of Olympus—and the Roman legion.

JAHDIEL

Smiling grimly.

A mighty combination, without doubt.

TIBERIUS

What if Alceda should refuse to wed Josephus?

JAHDIEL

With an assumption of great surprise.

That were a possibility of which I had not thought.

TIBERIUS

Will you send for her and leave the decision to her?

Jahdiel hesitates—he speaks softly with apparent kindness and sympathy.

JAHDIEL

It grieves me to pain your faithful heart—but Alceda is sick of a fever.

TIBERIUS

Starting up with alarm.

Sick? Let me go to her!

JAHDIEL

Indulgently.

The men of our country do not intrude upon the privacy of women.

TIBERIUS

Proudly.

Not even of their betrothed wives?

JAHDIEL

Sweetly.

Least of all—if there were any such here.

TIBERIUS

Sir, I consider Alceda my betrothed wife.

JAHDIEL

Smiling craftily.

Ah! that is a matter for decision—but later on—there will be time—let the matter bide,

pending her sickness and the Passover. When the Passover is ended, we will talk again.

TIBERIUS

Pleadingly.

I pray you, tell me, Jahdiel, is Alceda very sick? In mercy tell me.

JAHDIEL

With a gracious manner—as with great kindness.

Have no fear. It is slight; she is young and tender. The thought of Josephus' purpose —the mighty mystery of marriage shakes her spirit and the sorrow of leaving her Father's house: she has a slight fever in her blood; it is but a passing thing—complete quiet is her medicine. She will be quickly well again; only she sorely needs rest. Patience, Sir. You may trust a loving Father's eye to have a watchful care over his ewe lamb! I will talk with you again, after the Passover.

TIBERIUS

With dignity.

Perchance, I must be content with that.

JAHDIEL

Softly.

I fear you must. I will trust you not to disturb the quiet of these days. When the Passover is ended, then we will talk. I beg of your courtesy not an hour before.

TIBERIUS

And—if Josephus?—

JAHDIEL

Sir? She is my daughter. Personal affairs must wait on the feast of the Passover. Josephus would not forget the obligations of his sect. Will a Roman be considerate of our Laws and wait until the Passover is past?

TIBERIUS

I will wait until the Passover is past—you have the word of a Roman—and when the Passover is past?

JAHDIEL

When it is, we will consider.

TIBERIUS

Farewell, Sir.

JAHDIEL

Farewell.

Jahdiel bows very low and leads Tiberius to the gate: as he closes the gate after Tiberius he smiles craftily: he goes back to his seat and claps his hands: a servant enters.

JAHDIEL

Bring the culprit to me.

The servant goes out and returns dragging David in chains. David looks at Jahdiel defiantly.

JAHDIEL

Two hours ago I caught you at the door of the cell beneath the eaves: you were working at the lock. I had no time then: I ask you now—what were you doing?

DAVID

I will tell no lies: I was trying to open the door to save my Mistress.

JAHDIEL

Smiling grimly.

To save your Mistress? Indeed! Did you consider that you might lose yourself?

DAVID

I care not for myself! You may hew me to atoms—hack me in pieces, yet would I serve her.

JAHDIEL

I will cast you out where you can serve neither yourself nor her.

DAVID

Defiantly.

If the Light of this dwelling is gone I do not care whether or not I stay in it or whether I am cast out.

JAHDIEL

Savagely.

You will go with a sorry back that has been beaten with many stripes!

DAVID

Proudly.

I should rather have the hand that turned the key upon my Mistress smite me than have it stroke me!

JAHDIEL

Firmly to the servant.

After he has been beaten with many stripes cast him from out the gates—a penniless beggar.

DAVID

Each lash will be borne for her whom my heart honours!

JAHDIEL

Perchance, the stripes will be unto death!

DAVID

The Mosaic Law protects me, but if your wrath defies the Law then will I gladly die!

JAHDIEL

Silence! What know you of the Law?

To the servant.

Take the offender away—you have my orders!

ACT III

SCENE I

ACT III

SCENE I

Three Days Later

A bare stone cell in the house of Jahdiel. There is an open window with heavy bars at the opening and a stout door; a mattress of straw is in a corner; there are two rude chairs and a small table.

Alceda stands looking out through the barred window; she is very pale and wan; her eyes are large and appealing in their sadness. She has scarcely eaten or slept during the last three days; she has no veil and her loosened hair ripples around her form.

Alceda

In dreary tones.

The days creep on and I am prisoned here—no fragrant flowers, no murmuring trees, no sparkling fountain, no beautiful blue sky! only the striped patch of sunshine through the barred window—alas! alas! I have no faithful nurse—only that hard-visaged stranger—my

Elizabeth is forbidden to come to me—no word of Tiberius—O Tiberius!—my Love! my Love! Why have you left me to my fate? Where are you? Where is the power of Rome?

The bolt of the door is moved from without. Alceda gathers her forces to meet her Father with self-control. Enter Jahdiel, the Pharisee. He looks at Alceda with forbidding sternness.

JAHDIEL

Sternly.

Three days have passed—the time I promised you for thought. I come now for your decision. Will you, of your own will, renounce Tiberius? Will you, in obedience to my will, wed Josephus? Will you promise me that you will never look upon the cursed Nazarene again?

For three days Alceda has been face to face with the great realities of life and face to face with her own soul; the loftiness and dignity of a new maturity have come upon her: she draws herself up proudly.

ALCEDA

For three days, Father, I have thought of the words you said when you locked me in; for

three days I have pondered them: now I know my mind—it is unalterable. I will not renounce Tiberius—it would be broken faith. I will not wed Josephus—it would be blasphemy to love. I *must* seek the Nazarene, for I am persuaded that He holds the key to the door of new life!

JAHDIEL

Inexorably.

This then is the end! You are no longer a daughter of my House! I will take you to my vineyard lands beyond the hills, where my servants hold a stout tower. There, I will keep you silently, as a stranger. No word shall be spoken, for I will not have a second scandal get abroad. One scandal in the life of a Pharisee is too much! But, from henceforth, you are cut off, cast out from me and from my House.

He raises his right hand ominously. Alceda turns paler than before; she lifts her hands protestingly.

ALCEDA

Father—forbear! Do not curse me, I am a

Hebrew woman: for the love of Jehovah! Do not curse me!

JAHDIEL

Once more; will you promise these three things?

He stands with lifted hand ready to curse her.

ALCEDA

In despair.

O Father—Father—I cannot—I cannot promise—I dare not forswear my soul!

She falls upon the floor, and crouches against the wall, burying her face in her arms as one who is buffeted by a mighty storm.

JAHDIEL

In solemn wrath.

In the name of the Lord God of Hosts, from this day you are cut off from the House of your Fathers. May all evil come upon you! Cursed be your breasts that they give no suck; cursed be your womb that it bear no son! May your days be full of blighting and of mildew; and may the memory of your disobedi-

ence, wherein you broke the Law, be unto your remembrance—an open sore to bring you writhing and torment! In the name of Jehovah.

Jahdiel turns, and without looking at her, goes out of the door. Alceda hears the heavy bolt fall into the latch, the key turns in the lock. She crouches desolately on the ground, a motionless creature of despair, the curse resting upon her like a pall.

ALCEDA

God of my Fathers, have pity upon me! Have pity upon me! A Hebrew maiden cursed—cursed! How can I live under the curse of my Father!

She crouches silent a while in abject despair—suddenly the sound of shouting from the multitude comes through the barred window—Alceda raises her head and listens.

VOICES OF THE MULTITUDE

Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!

Alceda uncovers her face and listens intently: then she rises swiftly, goes to the barred window and looks out.

ALCEDA

It is He—the Nazarene!

She draws back from the window, raises her head, and stands as if remembering.

What were those words He said that day?—that happy day when Tiberius was beside me?—"Come unto me all ye that are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

She turns and stretches her arms through the bars of the window; she speaks in poignant tones.

O Master, Master, I am very weary—heavy-laden unto death—help me—help me! I am come!

Strength seems to infuse her, as though virtue had flowed back to her for the asking. After a pause.

And what were those other words that Miriam told me He said? "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." Ah! He blesses—He does not curse—curses fall away in His sight—a blessing flows into the soul of those who ask.

Her face grows more and more radiant as she leans against the bars of the window and looks after

Jesus, who has passed below. Voices from the street swell upward.

THE MULTITUDE

Hosanna! Hosanna!

ALCEDA

Softly.

Master, I also say hosanna—in my heart.

ACT III

SCENE II

ACT III

SCENE II

Two Days Later

The seat by the roadside, the same as in Act II, Scene I. Tiberius is sitting on the seat and looking down the road.

TIBERIUS

Between those olive trees stands the house where my beloved lies! My Flower of the Mountains, you are sick, and I cannot bear you in my arms; weary, and I cannot refresh you; in fever, and I cannot minister unto you! Two days more before the Passover is ended and I see her Father again: I have given my word to wait. Is he a crafty fox—or is he an honest Hebrew? This country is prolific of extremes. It is natural that he should desire to have a man of his own people for his son-in-law. I cannot blame him for that! He stoned his wife? That was cruel—yes—

but perhaps he thought that she was guilty. She was not: I know without proof, she was not guilty: Alceda's Mother was as white as snow! but perhaps he believed a lie of her and judged her without cause—he has the air of a relentless judge: and if he judged her guilty then his religion, his conscience, would bid him follow the harsh code of his religion. Ah! I ask myself once more is he an honest Hebrew—alert, stern, relentless, and forbidding—or is he a crafty fox? If a man be honest, true, sincere—then, one can handle him, though he were as hard as the unsplit rock; but if he be a hypocrite—it is a different thing. I do not like his eyes.

A heavily-veiled figure comes stealthily out from amongst the trees and approaches Tiberius. She is Elizabeth, Alceda's nurse, but she is so disguised that Alceda, herself, could not have recognised her.

ELIZABETH

Sir, I would speak with you.

TIBERIUS

Impatient of any interruption.

I have no ears.

ELIZABETH

You have a heart.

TIBERIUS

Not for strangers.

ELIZABETH

For the love of the God of Israel, hear me!

TIBERIUS

I know Him not.

ELIZABETH

Contemptuously.

It is the more pity and shame for you!

TIBERIUS

Let that be as it may.

ELIZABETH

We are wasting time.

TIBERIUS

Then, leave me, and waste it not.

ELIZABETH

For the love of Alceda, hear me!

TIBERIUS

Leaning quickly forward and grasping her arm.

Speak, woman!

ELIZABETH

In troth, I am trying to speak; I came for that purpose. But how can I speak when you will not listen? I do not like to talk to the wind, it is a sorry business to have one's words blown, unheeded, as thistle-down—I—

TIBERIUS

Sharply.

Speak, woman. Is she dead?

ELIZABETH

Earnestly.

God forbid!

TIBERIUS

In the name of Jupiter, who are you?

ELIZABETH

I do not answer heathen questions!—I worship Jehovah!

TIBERIUS

In the name of any god you please, who are you?

ELIZABETH

In a broken voice.

I am Elizabeth, the nurse of Alceda, cast off from the darling of my heart because of my love for her!

TIBERIUS

Tenderly, motioning her to the seat beside him.

Sit here, woman, and have no fear. The power of Rome will protect you and keep you from all want!

ELIZABETH

With a lofty gesture of disdain.

Want?—I do not want your Roman food; can your Roman food nourish me when I am hungry for my child! Can your Roman coin content me when I am cut in two?

TIBERIUS

Kindly.

No—but there are other things which might content you.

ELIZABETH

None that a Roman can give me. Rome is the enemy of Israel: Rome sits on her seven hills and shakes the men of Judea about as though they were dice for Her pleasure.

TIBERIUS

Then you would not care to live in Rome?

ELIZABETH

I should rather live in the bottomless pit, for there at least I should be safe.

TIBERIUS

I thought, perchance, you would like to share Alceda's home when she goes to Rome.

ELIZABETH

Sir, she will never go to Rome!

TIBERIUS

Impatiently.

Waste no words! Tell me of Alceda.

ELIZABETH

'Tis that I came to tell.

TIBERIUS

Then speak!

Elizabeth looks around carefully to be sure they are alone, then sits beside Tiberius and speaks in a low voice—but with startling distinctness.

ELIZABETH

Alceda is in prison.

TIBERIUS

Alarmed.

In prison? Where?

ELIZABETH

Pointing in the direction of Jahdiel's house.

There—in her Father's house, in a cell, a dirty cell—Oh, but it is dirty—a foul place beneath the eaves, built for unruly servants of the house! My dainty darling, with her fragrant ways! She who must ever have her linen snowy clean and bathes herself in perfume.

TIBERIUS

Interrupting.

Is she sick?

ELIZABETH

Continuing.

Who ever binds her hair with sweet smelling waters and perfumes her body with ointments of the rose.

TIBERIUS

Impatiently.

Answer my question—*is she sick?*

ELIZABETH

Could she be well without me? She knows not how to care for herself—she knows not how to bind her hair: I have always tended her—I am her foster-mother.

TIBERIUS

With tense impatience.

Woman, I have waited too long on your everlasting tongue—is she sick?

ELIZABETH

My tongue is but given me to make things plain

—how can I say what I have come to say unless I use my tongue?

TIBERIUS

In despair.

Your tongue is very precious, if only it were not so long. Tell me of Alceda. Is she sick?

ELIZABETH

I do not know—to-day.

TIBERIUS

Was she very sick yesterday?—the day before?—*any* day?—she was sick five days ago, when I was with her Father: he told me of her fever.

ELIZABETH

Five days ago?—No. That day she was well, and yesterday she was well, in body, but her heart—Oh, her heart! It is broken! He dragged her from me and locked her in. David, the servant boy, tried to save her—he would lay down his life for Alceda—the rescue was planned: I waited while he went to break open the door, to pick the lock. He can do it: he is a sly one—David!—no one knows of

the many locks he has broken open, but this time I was glad for once for his sly tricks. I waited in hiding, holding my breath. He was caught in the *very* act by Jahdiel and Jahdiel had no mercy—Poor boy! Poor boy! He is not so bad: only mischievous. He was beaten until he was near to death and then he was cast out into the street, to die. I, alone, was left—I watched beside Alceda, whom I could not see—I lay before the door of the cell and hushed my breath to listen—I whispered words of comfort through the door. Every night I lay on the stone floor before that barred door until dawn. Last night Jahdiel found me and sent me also out of the house. Since I have gone, Alceda may be sick—I cannot tell—she may be very sick—she may be dead.

Elizabeth begins to moan.

TIBERIUS

With anger in his eyes.

Jahdiel is a liar!

ELIZABETH

Have you only just found that out, to-day? I have known it a long while.

TIBERIUS

Five days ago, he told me Alceda was sick—to wait a week, then come to him again: and, then, I might see Alceda.

ELIZABETH

With a shrug of her shoulders.

And before you come, he will have sent her hence, and he will have some new lie for you.

TIBERIUS

Ah! Not now! Have no fear, Elizabeth, all will be well.

ELIZABETH

You do not know Jahdiel, the Pharisee!

TIBERIUS

I know the power of Rome!

ELIZABETH

Alarmed.

If you bring the power of Rome to aid you, Jahdiel will stab Alceda through the heart!

TIBERIUS

Anxiously.

You think that?

ELIZABETH

I know it! Jahdiel would rather hang upon a gibbet as high as Haman's, than not have his own way—I pray you do not bring the soldiers of Rome, for in the hour that they come, Alceda will surely die!

TIBERIUS

Trying to keep up his own courage.

Rome has other ways than force, my friend. We will match subtlety with subtlety. I must think—I must consider. Stay near where I can find you: keep me informed of anything you hear: we will yet save her.

ELIZABETH

Moaning.

O my darling—my little lamb!

TIBERIUS

To himself.

In prison? It cannot be! The very bolts

would fall away before the strength of her innocence; the doors would open to the power of her virgin loveliness!

ELIZABETH

In despair.

Ough! You know not the locks and the bolts on the doors of the house of Jahdiel, the Pharisee.

Elizabeth continues to moan.

TIBERIUS

Laying his hand upon her arm.

Be comforted, my poor woman.

ELIZABETH

Considering him.

You are not so bad, after all, for a Roman.

TIBERIUS

Taking her hand.

I love Alceda, you love Alceda. Love knows no country, no class, no caste, no sect.

ELIZABETH

With a suggestion of tenderness in her voice, which no one but Alceda has ever heard there before.

You are a brave gentleman: you are comfort-

ing me, when, methinks, you need comfort yourself.

TIBERIUS

Ah—that I do, in very truth!

Tiberius offers her a purse.

Here, my good woman, this may meet your need.

ELIZABETH

Drawing back.

I thank you, Sir, but a Hebrew takes no Roman coin—A Hebrew needs no Roman gold. I have many friends who will house me until I find work to do.

TIBERIUS

Give it to David, then: he will take it, will he not?

ELIZABETH

Scornfully.

David? Ay! He would take the dust from off the shoes of a Roman if it did advantage him: he has neither honour nor pride.

Tiberius thrusts the purse into her hand.

TIBERIUS

Then, give it to him—give the gold to David and let him be your messenger: send me any word that you may hear and he will carry word to you—of my plans.

ELIZABETH

Plans—plans? It is as well to make barriers of straw before the wind as to make any plans to stay the hand of Jahdiel.

TIBERIUS

Woman, the outcome of our plans, the outcome of our destiny, is on the lap of the Gods. Jahdiel—your Beelzebub himself—cannot stop what is to be.

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth looks at him sternly, drawing herself up proudly.

He is not *my* Beelzebub!

TIBERIUS

He belongs to your nation!

ELIZABETH

Ay, that he does—and you would believe in him if you knew Jahdiel!

TIBERIUS

I know all that I desire to know of Jahdiel.

ELIZABETH

I must hence, would that I might go to Alceda!

TIBERIUS

Our Destiny is safe in the hands of our Gods—

ELIZABETH

Perhaps that means somewhat the same as The Lord God will lead me.

TIBERIUS

It is the same, Elizabeth—all true religions are the same at their hearts: a power higher than ourselves to trust—an earnest effort to find and follow the Everlasting God.

ELIZABETH

You are a kind gentleman—I do not wonder Alceda loves you. Farewell.

TIBERIUS

Pray to your God—and I will pray to mine—and Destiny will lead us.

Elizabeth makes a low obeisance and goes off.

Age after age man has dreamed of God and still he dreams: age after age man has sought for Him and still he seeks. Jupiter—Jehovah—it is the same: worship, trust, prayer, service, reaching out for help, for guidance. Oh—would that the great Spirit would send some Logos to teach us, some manifestation to show us the best way to go!

ACT III

SCENE III

ACT III

SCENE III

THE DAY ON WHICH WAS CRUCIFIED

JESUS OF NAZARETH.

A green hill without the walls that lie around the City of Jerusalem. The hill is bare of trees—the City of Jerusalem can be seen to the right of the hill.

A seething mass of people—soldiers, peasants, priests, profligates, Publicans, Pharisees, Sadducees, and men of the Court, women and children are constantly passing, at the bottom of the hill, on their way to Golgotha, which lies beyond.

On the hill are sitting Tiberius: Nicodemus—a Ruler in Israel: Antiocles—a Greek philosopher: and Marius—a gay Roman courtier.

The confused sounds of the shouting of the rabble, the clanking of the armour of soldiers and the babble of voices can be heard coming from Golgotha.

NICODEMUS

Thoughtfully.

This is a day of wrath. Rome will be condemned for this day!

TIBERIUS

Rome? Condemned? Rome will not bear the burden of this day. It is your own High Priests who have done the deed: the shadow of it will rest upon the Hebrew Hierarchy. Pilate has washed his hands of it!

NICODEMUS

He who washes his hands of a bad matter which he could prevent is the one who will bear the most blame.

TIBERIUS

Considering.

I think, perhaps, that that is true.

MARIUS

Speaking in a light, gay voice.

It is neither the High Priests nor the Romans who do this deed—it is the people. They were all tired of the pestilential strife stirred up by this Jesus. Jews, Romans, Greeks, Barbarians, the Populace, the Rabble—they all demanded it! I do not blame them. He is against all established order, even of His own

church—your church, Nicodemus—which, at least, keeps the peace.

NICODEMUS

With dignity.

It was not because He stirred up strife: it was because He told men the truth: men do not like to be told the truth about themselves: they like better to be thought the thing they profess, the thing they claim to be, but this Jesus covered not His words: He spoke clearly, without wax, and so they all wanted to be rid of Him.

ANTIOCLES

It was but five days since we heard them shouting hosannas to Him as though they would make Him king—that was also the voice of the people.

TIBERIUS

And but now they shouted "Crucify Him!"—Bah! the voice of the people is the voice of the devil!

ANTIOCLES

A certain Greek has said that "the voice of the people is the voice of truth."

MARIUS

Smiling sarcastically.

Greece has many things to learn, Antiocles.

ANTIOCLES

Lifting his eyebrows.

From Rome?

MARIUS

Politely, with suavity.

Ay, from Rome.

TIBERIUS

Turning to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, what think you of this Nazarene?

NICODEMUS

I think He is a sincere, a righteous man, a prophet, a second Isaiah, with this added power —He comprehends the spirit of our day and generation.

TIBERIUS

Thoughtfully.

I have weighed His words and it seems to me

He comprehends the spirit of all days and all generations—He speaks to the human heart.

ANTIOCLES

The human heart is ever the same from generation to generation, wherever the country, whatever the time.

MARIUS

If He is true and comprehends our times, why do so many men think that He is mad?

TIBERIUS

Men ever think that he who has a vision is mad. It may be that His words will last when Rome has passed away.

MARIUS

How you have changed of late, Tiberius! Your constant study has unsteadied you: where is the Tiberius whose life was all gaiety and mirth?

TIBERIUS

He has learned somewhat.

Sorrowfully, looking toward Golgotha.

We sit here as He hangs upon that cross—we are as impotent to help as little children in the dark.

MARIUS

With arrogance.

He is but the son of a carpenter—only one of the common toilers of the earth: wherefore is the noble Tiberius so distressed?—It is but one of countless deaths that take place every day.

TIBERIUS

Sharply.

He is a man with a message from the Gods—and they crucify Him! Would to God I could have died in His stead! I have no message.

MARIUS

Mystified.

I know not what you mean.

TIBERIUS

I scarce know myself.

NICODEMUS

I thought at first He proposed to build up a

kingdom: He had great power—the people were with Him—they desired to crown Him. I went to Him by night and questioned Him: after that, I concluded that He had no thought of earthly preferment.

TIBERIUS

Eagerly.

You went to Him? You questioned Him?

NICODEMUS

In a puzzled tone as if scarce understanding the words that he repeated.

He said—"Ye must be born again."

MARIUS

Laughing.

"Born again!" Ha! Ha! Born a second time! Is He a jester—? It were a difficult task for you to be born again—you measure full six feet in height.

NICODEMUS

Speaking to Tiberius and ignoring Marius.

I asked Him how that could be—and He said a strange thing.

TIBERIUS

With great eagerness.

What said He?

NICODEMUS

Slowly as if considering the words.

He said—and without doubt He spoke as one having authority—"that which is born of the flesh is flesh: that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

MARIUS

Flippantly.

"Born of the Spirit!" The man is mad—beyond doubt! That is the easiest of all births —no travail, no labour—

NICODEMUS

If I understand aright—it is the very hardest of all births: the birth of the flesh is as nothing to the throes and anguish of a birth of the spirit: one has to struggle with all the forces of evil—the powers of the Devil.

ANTIOCLES

Thoughtfully.

"Born of the Spirit"? That is a subtle thought —it challenges the mind.

TIBERIUS

Aside.

"Born of the Spirit"? I understand it better than I once would—since I have loved Alceda I think I have been born of the Spirit.

Aloud.

I would we could hear His words, if He should speak, but we are too far off.

MARIUS

Turning to Tiberius courteously.

By all the Gods, Tiberius, I am glad that you did not insist upon our waiting upon the hill of Golgotha. You are a man of great persuasion, and if you had insisted I fear we should have obeyed you.

TIBERIUS

You are as clay in the hands of the potter, Marius, are you not?

MARIUS

With the air of a courtier.

When the noble Tiberius is the potter then am I the clay. But I like better to have this distance between our contemplation and the crowd. The Fates preserve us from that rabble by the cross.

ANTIOCLES

Thoughtfully, looking toward Golgotha.

That cruel crowd! Those idle gazers! That jeering throng! That scoffing multitude! For a fine spirit, that must be the bitterest of all.

TIBERIUS

Eagerly leaning forward.

Behold! my servant comes from Golgotha: he had orders to report to me if the Crucified should speak.

The servant enters: they all turn to him with great interest and curiosity.

THE SERVANT

To Tiberius.

Sir, He has spoken.

TIBERIUS

Quickly.

What were His words?

THE SERVANT

Evidently much affected.

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

TIBERIUS

Much agitated.

Did He say *that?* Heard you the words aright?

THE SERVANT

All those who stood near the cross could hear the words.

Tiberius makes a peremptory motion of the hand—exit the Servant.

TIBERIUS

Emphatically.

He is of God—none but a man infused with divine power from Olympus could forgive that dreadful death—that cruel injustice—that ignominy—that horror—

NICODEMUS

Sorrowfully.

The bitter shame—to a son of Israel!

MARIUS

With a shudder, stroking the palms of his soft white hands.

The agonizing pain of the flesh!

ANTIOCLES

Understandingly.

The incomparable pain of the spirit!

MARIUS

Sceptically to Tiberius.

Tiberius, if He be, as you think, endowed with power from on High, why then does He not save Himself?

TIBERIUS

I know not! I wish I knew.

ANTIOCLES

This may be the way.

MARIUS

Curling his lip scornfully.

Death the way of salvation?

ANTIOCLES

Self-sacrifice—the way of immortality: and immortality that has been won by a great deed —the way of salvation.

NICODEMUS

Turning to Antiocles.

Antiocles, verily the Greeks have much sympathy in their thought with the mind of Judea.

ANTIOCLES

Sir, the Greeks have sympathy with the thought of all nations: Greece was never provincial.

NICODEMUS

Your word matches the word of one of our Hebrew kings who said: "Great deeds bring immortality."

ANTIOCLES

In very truth they do.

NICODEMUS

This is a great deed: to have authority with the people—and to forgo it: to be hung upon the bitter cross—and to forgive it. Yea, it is an immortal deed!

Upon the hilltop no one speaks. The four men sit in silence looking toward Golgotha. After a time the servant enters again swiftly—he has been running from Golgotha.

THE SERVANT

Excitedly.

His God has deserted Him! His God has deserted Him!

TIBERIUS

Sternly and eagerly.

How know you that? What were His words?

THE SERVANT

He cried with a loud voice so that all men could hear Him—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and His face was sorrowful unto death.

A look of bitter disappointment comes over Tiberius:

he makes a gesture of command and the servant goes back to Golgotha.

TIBERIUS

In a tone of deep disappointment.

He is only a man, after all.

MARIUS

Laughing lightly.

An impostor—as I have said from the beginning.

NICODEMUS

Decidedly and sternly.

Were He an impostor He would not have said those words: He would have measured His words for the record.

MARIUS

Pain of the flesh makes men cry out.

NICODEMUS

With a voice of authority.

Were it the pain of the flesh He would have cried out in the beginning. I thought, per-

chance, He would. I waited for it, but as He did not cry out *in the beginning,* surely it is *not* pain of the flesh: the agony of the accursed crucifixion is the very sharpest when men first hang upon the cross and it was then that He said those divine words which none but a Son of God could have uttered—"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" —pity for the ignorance of His murderers—pardon for their cruelty—it was a supreme triumph!

TIBERIUS

Turning impatiently to Nicodemus.

Then of what import was His later cry?

NICODEMUS

It may be that His flesh is growing faint and that the cloud of physical darkness falls over His spirit as it falls over the spirit of all men in dying. It may be that pain has made His mind to wander and the old Hebrew songs He learned in childhood haunt His memory—one of our Hebrew songs is "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" It *may* be that His great soul

would lift the burden of the world for others—the suffering and the sin—and that stupendous shadow hides for a moment the face of God. I cannot yet judge—I wait to hear what His final *death-word* will be.

ANTIOCLES

Aroused to keen intellectual interest.

"Lift the burden of the world for others?" That is a majestic thought!—Atonement—atonement for mankind!—but it is not a new thought. Sophocles divined it long ago: he gave us a mind-compelling word.

MARIUS

Does any new thought come to us that Greece does not claim it?

ANTIOCLES

Is there any old thought of the Grecian philosophers that Rome does not arrogate to Herself? Nicodemus, do you know the Antigone of Sophocles?

NICODEMUS

I do not know it.

ANTIOCLES

In his Antigone, Sophocles says these words: "One soul working in the strength of love is mightier than ten thousand to atone." (*Thoughtfully.*) What if this death be an act of love—love for the world—a desire to atone for the blindness—the folly—the sins of mankind?

TIBERIUS

Aside, looking toward Golgotha.

I had not thought His God would forsake Him. I had not thought His faith would falter—No, not to the very end!

No one speaks upon the hilltop—the four men sit in silence. Marius stretches himself upon the grass and falls asleep. Nicodemus lifts his hands in prayer: he is silently saying the Hebrew prayers for the dying. Antiocles sits, wrapped in philosophic contemplation. Tiberius looks toward Golgotha with tense, almost breathless expectancy. Suddenly, the servant enters running: he is very pale: he is trembling.

THE SERVANT

In a broken voice.

Sir, it is finished!

TIBERIUS

Tensely.

Tell us of the end!

Marius starts up—Antiocles and Nicodemus assume a listening and attentive attitude—Tiberius is intent and eager.

THE SERVANT

I never looked upon so great a thing!

ALL

Impatiently.

Speak!

THE SERVANT

I stood near the cross. I saw all—I heard all: it is very certain He is no shadow lord—His dying words bring proof that He is no dreamer of dreams—He is a practical man like unto other men—there was a word for the care and the comfort of His Mother, as any man might give: there was a cry of pain from parching thirst, as any man might have upon the cross: there was a word of brotherly compassion and hope to the thief beside Him—Think of it, from a teacher to a robber! Then all was silent—

even the rabble had somewhat ceased their clamour for a space and then—

TIBERIUS

Eagerly.

And then?

NICODEMUS

With alert interest.

And then?

MARIUS

With careless curiosity.

And then?

THE SERVANT

Then the cry—"It is finished." I looked up into His face: it was as beautiful as morning —on His lips there was a smile—a smile that hurt me here:

The servant puts his hand over his heart.

a wonderful look came into His eyes: it was a look of victory as though He had conquered all the battles of all the world, and then in clear, calm tones He said these words

—"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." An instant passed: He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.

TIBERIUS

With great exultation.

His God was with Him—at the end. He is true!

NICODEMUS

Sharply.

Did you doubt it?

TIBERIUS

Yes, when He said His God had forsaken Him —I did doubt it.

NICODEMUS

Then, least of all, all faith is stronger for a moment's doubt—it is the shadow which proves the light—that doubt is a proof of His humanity and becomes a warrant of His truth.

ANTIOCLES

It is because of those words *I* can believe Him: He was no impostor, no actor, but a real man

who is a supreme philosopher. Those words echo the heart of all men in hours of agony—but His *final* word is the convincing proof.

MARIUS

Sceptically.

He is sure of His God, is He not?

NICODEMUS

With dignity.

Sir, we of our race are ever sure of our God: He faileth not.

MARIUS

But this Jesus is also sure of Himself.

TIBERIUS

That is enough for me! If a man can be sure of himself as he goes down into the Shades—If he can commend his spirit with calm confidence to Him who waits beyond—it is enough.

NICODEMUS

You are right, Tiberius, the life of this Nazarene is vindicated by the manner of His death.

Thoughtfully to himself.

I must ponder how I can be born again!

MARIUS

After a brief silence, with new respect in his tone.

A brave man has died this day!

NICODEMUS

With deep sorrow.

A mighty Master has fallen in Israel!

ANTIOCLES

With conviction.

A great Philosopher has passed into the Shades!

But Tiberius utters no word: he stands motionless—his head uncovered, looking toward Golgotha. A deep darkness slowly descends upon the earth: it covers the hilltop like a pall—the earth quakes: through the darkness can be heard the shrieks and the groans of the terrified.

ACT III

SCENE IV

ACT III

SCENE IV

Two Hours Later

The seat by the roadside as in Act II, Scene I. The great veil of darkness that has enwrapped the earth is slowly lifting—the light is beginning to break—the hills, the bushes, the trees and the stone seat slowly emerge from the darkness and take form in the shadowy mist. Jahdiel's house can be seen in the distance.

Tiberius stands in the shadows and looks around in a bewildered way—after a moment he gets his bearings and knows where he is—for some time he has been walking blindly, through the darkness and when the light breaks he finds himself in the familiar place.

Tiberius

Thanks be to all the Gods that led me here! Love guided my feet. The Poet, Cariston, is right, "Love walks unscathed upon a brazen sea and falters not in darkness." I knew not

where to turn when the darkness fell; but I followed my heart—

Suddenly, through the misty twilight that still covers the earth, he sees Alceda.

O Gods of Olympus!

Aloud in glad surprise.

Alceda!

She starts; gives a long, low moan and runs into his arms.

ALCEDA

With a cry.

Tiberius—Tiberius—What is it?—Where am I?—What has befallen the earth?

He folds her in his arms and soothes her.

TIBERIUS

You are safe, Beloved! Tremble not, my Flower, the earth is quiet now: the darkness is fast lifting: and you are in my arms: be not afraid!

ALCEDA

In a voice of terror.

O Tiberius, I am afraid—I am sore afraid—

I have been imprisoned these many days in my Father's house—and you came not—Oh! you came not—Suddenly, all grew black around me and the earth shook—I trembled in the darkness—I fell upon the floor and lay there, I heard around me crashes, the breaking of beams, and fearsome noises—I thought the house was falling upon my head—a long time I lay frightened and terrified—then, I remembered that I was not alone, that the Lord God Omnipotent was with me—He quieted my pulses and I began to think—I thought of you, Tiberius—and the awful death that had so affrighted me seemed a blessed escape: surely it were better to die, than to live apart from you—and my Father intends never to let me see your face again.

TIBERIUS

Embracing her.

My Beloved! There is no life for you apart from me, any more.

ALCEDA

Suddenly the darkness began to lift and this

gray light dawned: I arose and groped my way along the stone wall until I found the door. Thanks be to Jehovah! in answer to my prayer it yielded to my touch—the bolts and the lock had slipped back when the earth shook—I hastened out—I ran from room to room—I called but no living creature was there—my Father was gone—my nurse was gone—the servants were gone—even my dog was gone—and my little bird was dead from fright. I ran out into the street—and then, I ran into your arms.

TIBERIUS

That is an omen, Alceda.

ALCEDA

Verily I think it is.

TIBERIUS

Fate would not let the prison door hold you—I said the bolts would fall back before you.

ALCEDA

Tiberius—what has happened?

TIBERIUS

He is dead!

ALCEDA

Startled.

Who is dead?

TIBERIUS

Jesus of Nazareth!

Alceda hides her face upon Tiberius' breast and clings to him in the half-darkness.

ALCEDA

Dead?—I did not think that He could die!

TIBERIUS

Nor can He! They hung Him on the cross and He gave up the ghost—but He is not dead. He will live for ever! When it was finished, an earthquake shook the earth and a great darkness fell.

ALCEDA

Pale and trembling.

They have crucified Him? O Tiberius—I cannot bear it!

TIBERIUS

He bore it; He had no fear; He forgave those who crucified Him and in dying He commended His soul to God. My Flower of the Mountains, do not tremble so.

ALCEDA

Tiberius, you believe that He is of God?

TIBERIUS

I know not: but this one thing I know—there is more of God in Him and in His words than in all the scholars and all the teachers in the world—that is enough for me.

ALCEDA

Laying her hand softly on Tiberius' arm and speaking with sudden dignity.

Tiberius, I have no home, no name—my Father has cursed me and cast me off—I am no longer his daughter.

TIBERIUS

That is well: you are cast out—therefore your home is here: you are not your Father's daugh-

ter any longer—therefore, I may claim you without fear to you of breaking the law. Beloved, you are my bride and though Jahdiel has cursed you, the Nazarene—the Man from the Gods—has blessed you. Will you come with me?

A glow of great beauty suffuses her wan face.

ALCEDA

Giving Tiberius her hand.

I will go with you to the edge of the world and I will go over the edge into the void without fear, if you hold my hand.

TIBERIUS

Kissing her hand.

Beautiful little hand! *My* hand!

ALCEDA

O Tiberius, I was so sore afraid and just when I had lost all hope I found your arms.

TIBERIUS

My Flower of the Mountains! That is a parable.

The mist has been lifting more and more—it has been growing lighter—figures can be seen moving about —suddenly, Jahdiel is seen hastening down the road.

ALCEDA

Alarmed.

There comes my Father!

TIBERIUS

Courage, Alceda! He has ceased to be your Father since he cast you off—leave all to me.

Jahdiel comes nearer.

ALCEDA

With hesitation.

My Father! O my Father!

JAHDIEL

With much severity.

Alceda, how came you here? Back to your cell!

He approaches Alceda to seize her.

TIBERIUS

Stepping between Jahdiel and Alceda.

She is a Roman matron who walks when and

where she will! In very fact Alceda is now of Rome: she is my betrothed bride—we but await the morrow to legalise the tie.

Jahdiel is very angry: he tries again to seize Alceda.

JAHDIEL

She is my daughter in the law!

TIBERIUS

Sir, she is no longer your daughter: you dissolved the bond when you cursed her and cast her off—from that hour she was free: an earthquake shook Judea when you crucified the Prophet Jesus; all was dark: my Gods or your God—whichever you will—led me on through the darkness to this place: here I found Alceda wandering alone, without protection, and she gave herself to me: she is now my wife, waiting only until to-morrow for the outward form. I draw around her the circle of Rome and if you come between us the power of Rome will deal with you!

Alceda stretches out her hand with a cry.

ALCEDA

No—no, Tiberius!

Turning to her Father with dignity.

It is because of your own dreadful words, my Father, that I am here—you made me an outcast and an outcast is free to go where she will.

JAHDIEL

Though you are an outcast you are still my daughter. I care not for the power of Rome! If Rome takes you from me it shall take food for carrion.

He draws a dagger from the folds of his garment and rushes toward Alceda. Tiberius grasps his arm—they are both of about the same stature and both powerful men; they wrestle.

ALCEDA

With an agonising cry.

O Tiberius, have a care! He is my Father! O Father, be pitiful—I love him!

They wrestle, suddenly a shrouded figure runs swiftly by.

THE SHROUDED FIGURE

Crying in a loud voice.

The Veil of the Temple is rent in twain—the

Veil of the Temple is rent in twain. Jehovah save us!

The look of hostility in Jahdiel's face changes to a look of paralysed horror: his hand drops powerless at his side.

JAHDIEL

In an awed tone.

Lord God of Israel! Have mercy upon us!

The dagger drops from his powerless hand and he hurries after the shrouded figure. Alceda begins to tremble violently.

ALCEDA

In a voice of terror.

"The Veil of the Temple?" O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

TIBERIUS

Taking her hand reverently.

Fear not, Alceda—a new order has dawned upon the earth.

ALCEDA

In much agitation.

You do not understand, Tiberius—you are not

a Hebrew—the Ark of the Covenant stood behind that Veil!

TIBERIUS

Pointing in the direction of Golgotha.

From that dark cross a new Covenant is made.

In the distance are heard the voices of certain holy women—followers of Jesus.

THE WOMEN

Chanting.

"He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted —to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

ALCEDA

He has opened my prison, Tiberius!

TIBERIUS

He has opened it to happiness and home. Alceda, will you come with me?

ALCEDA

To the end of the world, Tiberius, and into the dark!

TIBERIUS

There will be no dark, Beloved, from henceforth, all will be light, rosy light for you, and for me—with you beside me. All now is well—you are safe, your Father has gone. I will take you to the house of a noble Roman lady who is my friend. I will bring there, Elizabeth, your nurse.

ALCEDA

My dear, dear nurse! She is gone!

TIBERIUS

I will seek her—I know her abiding place. To-night you and she will rest, in the house of my friend—to-morrow the Laws of Rome will make you mine, and then we will set sail upon the boundless, beautiful, blue Sea: we will sail and sail until we come to Rome! I will spread flower-decked curtains above your head and the musicians shall play to you as the boat moves beneath the azure sky—we will watch the sparkle of the sunshine upon the sea—the wind shall sing to us—our days shall be full

of gladness and at night the friendly stars shall guard our nuptials.

THE WOMEN

In the distance, chanting.

"To comfort all that mourn; to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

TIBERIUS

Tenderly.

"The oil of joy for mourning"—my Beloved!

ALCEDA

With a glow of radiance in her face.

"The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

THE END

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